

Nourishing the Dhamma

Vegetarianism and Animal Nonviolence in Theravāda Buddhism

with a special focus on Sinhala Buddhism

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Abstract:

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Pāli canonical texts routinely report the Buddha as saying that a good Buddhist must never kill another living creature. Such statements are, in many cases, explicitly applied to the case of animals. Not only do such claims imply animal protectionism, but they also imply vegetarianism: if animals are not to be killed, then it seems to follow trivially that they cannot be eaten either. Yet this seemingly trivial move from the non-killing of animals to the non-eating of them is explicitly avoided in the Pāli canonical texts.

This project investigates the *prima facie* case for vegetarianism, both in the Pāli canonical texts and in the Theravāda tradition more widely — a living tradition that is, in certain crucial ways, based upon that textual tradition. The textual component of this investigation is largely confined to an examination of Pāli canonical texts. In respect to the lived Theravāda tradition, the project specifically engages Sinhala Buddhism as practised in Sri Lanka. The latter investigation is made possible by fieldwork conducted at various times throughout 2011 and early 2012 in the Colombo and Kēgalle areas.

In the first half of the thesis, I argue that, within the Pāli canon, a conflict arises around the issue of vegetarianism. Although the canon implies vegetarianism based upon its first principles, this vegetarianism is explicitly denied. I suggest that this denial could be explained as a historical anomaly brought about by certain prudential and circumstantial factors. The non-endorsement of vegetarianism, therefore, may not represent the Buddha's considered and final ethical view on this matter.

The second half of the thesis is primarily ethnographic in character. I argue in this section that the same conflict that we find in the textual tradition is repeated in the contemporary lived tradition. Lay informants maintained a pro-attitude to vegetarianism and generally concluded that a good Buddhist ought to be a vegetarian. Monastic informants, however, were far more circumspect about the issue and tended to remain agnostic as to whether vegetarianism was morally acceptable.

I conclude by arguing that Theravāda Buddhism, as represented by my sample of Sinhala informants and the textual tradition that operates in the background, generally favours vegetarianism, but a wide range of largely circumstantial factors results in the stymying of the expression of this vegetarianism. This unusual tension should not necessarily be taken as a defect in Buddhism — rather, Theravāda Buddhism is highly sensitive to context and

encourages the negotiation of moral problems in a flexible and open-ended way. The results of this study therefore tell us something useful about Buddhist Ethics more generally.

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The research associated with this thesis abides by the international and Australian codes on human and animal experimentation, the guidelines by the Australian Government's Office of the Gene Technology Regulator and the rulings of the Safety, Ethics and Institutional Biosafety Committees of the University.

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Key to Text Notation

AN.....	<i>Aṅguttara Nikāya</i>
Atth.....	<i>Atthasālinī</i> of Buddhaghosa
BV.....	<i>Buddhavaṃsa</i>
Dn.....	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>
Iti.....	<i>Itivuttaka</i>
Jat.....	<i>Jātaka</i> tales
Mil.....	<i>Milindapañha</i>
Mn.....	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i>
Mv.....	<i>The Mahāvaṃsa</i>
S.....	<i>Sutta Nipāta</i>
Sn.....	<i>Samyutta Nikāya</i>
Thera.....	<i>Theragāthā</i>
U.....	<i>Udāna</i>
Vin-BV.....	<i>Vinaya: Bhikkhuni-vibhaṅga</i>
Vin-CV.....	<i>Vinaya: Cūlavaṃsa</i>
Vin-MV.....	<i>Vinaya Mahāvaṃsa</i>
Vin-Pat.....	<i>Vinaya Pāṭi</i> imokkha
Vis.....	<i>Visuddhimagga</i> of Buddhaghosa
PP.....	<i>Puggala-Paññatti</i>
RV.....	<i>The Rājāvaliya</i>
SK.....	<i>Sūtrakritāṅga</i>

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Note on languages:

I have not indicated specifically where I use Pāli words and where I use Sinhala words because I believe that it is clear based on the context. Chapters 1–3 are concerned primarily with the Pāli language, because I mainly examine canonical textual sources here. Chapters 3–6 utilise Sinhala more heavily, because they are anthropological in character, and I often refer to transcripts of interviews conducted in Sinhala. In terms of transliteration I have tried to follow the conventions set out by writers on Sinhala Buddhism. I have, as best I can, used Gombrich and Obeyesekere as a model for transliteration. Consequently, I retained the use of diacritics.

It should be noted that there are no consistent conventions amongst all writers on Sinhala Buddhism – for example, Kapferer does not use diacritics. When I was not sure, I followed the transliteration practices set out in the *Dematapitiya* dictionary. As for Pāli, I followed the conventional transliteration practices modelled by Bhikkhu Bodhi in his translations.

The Sinhala translations are a combined effort between myself and my co investigator Kumudu Stewart - the written Sinhala was translated exclusively by myself, while the interviews were translated cooperatively. Naturally I take sole responsibility for any errors in these translations. The Pāli translations, however, are from various sources. Where possible I have used Bhikkhu Bodhi's translations, but sometimes I have also used the Pali Text Society translations. In cases where the PTS translations were especially anachronistic (and this does happen from time to time) I have made some changes to the translations but I have made a note of when this was necessary.

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INTRODUCTION | VEGETARIANISM IN THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM AND SRI LANKA

Having reflected thus, he abstains from the destruction of life, exhorts others to abstain from the destruction of life, and speaks in praise of abstinence from the destruction of life. Thus bodily conduct of his is purified in three respects. (SN, 55.7, p. 1797).

Since the beginnings of early Buddhist scholarship, it has been widely accepted that Buddhists are particularly concerned with animal welfare. This sensitivity to animal welfare has, at times, captured the imagination of the West, and is both a source of considerable fascination and, sometimes, puzzlement. Take, for example, this public statement made by Robert Moncrief in 1879:

Sirs and ladies, I venture to ask you if any people on the face of the earth seem to be more utterly indifferent to the shedding of blood and to human suffering than the followers of Buddhism. At the same time, with all this wretched, horrible disregard for human suffering and human life, they show the greatest care for animal life... These contradictions are parts of the darkness proceeding out of the Light of Asia, which we are asked to accept in preference to the Light of the World (applause).ⁱ

The Light of Asia — written by Edwin Arnold — was one of the earliest introductions that Europeans had to the subject of Buddhism. *The Light of Asia* is a poem that describes the life and achievements of Gotama Buddha. Moncrief's criticism of this poem is interesting for at least two reasons. First, because it illustrates the way in which Buddhism was perceived of as a threat by the Christian orthodoxy. Second, because, even amongst its critics, Buddhism was recognised as a doctrine that espoused a pacifistic attitude towards animal life. Indeed, it was viewed as a threat *because* of its pacifistic attitude towards animals. As we see throughout this thesis, this interpretation of Buddhism is correct – there is considerable evidence that Theravāda Buddhism maintains a pro-attitude towards animals expressed within the commentarial literature, both modern and historical. But, more than this, there appears to be a precedent for this sort of assessment in the canonical literature: Theravāda Buddhist texts tend to universally favour the non-harming and non-killing of animals.

Theravāda Buddhists themselves also display similar pro-attitudes towards animals and, again, a basis for this view exists in the scholarly literature. This is shown to be the case throughout this thesis, the latter point being shown through reference to Sinhala Buddhists.

The fact that both the Buddhist textual tradition and the living Buddhist tradition speak favourably on behalf of animals does not, however, mean that one's diet will necessarily be modified to accommodate this. In fact, a great deal of ethnographic evidence has been deployed to show that, for the most part, many Theravāda Buddhists do not maintain a vegetarian diet. Similarly, the textual tradition makes quite clear that meat eating is perfectly acceptable. Yet these results might strike one as odd: why does a tradition that focuses so much on the preservation of life, including animal life, seem so blasé about the origins of the food on our plates? If this tradition is so sensitive to causes and conditions, why does it not also recognise that meat eating depends on animal slaughter? As a religion, Buddhism seems uniquely placed to accommodate vegetarianism: after all, other religious traditions are much more ambiguous about the moral status of animals. A conventional interpretation of the New Testament, for example, maintains that animals were provided by God for human enjoyment, and so the consumption of animals is therefore acceptable. The fact that animals might suffer in that process is not especially relevant. But Buddhism has little recourse to such argument because it views suffering as evil, and it does not matter who the bearer of the suffering is: suffering is not good and it simply ought to end.

So, again, we may wonder why it is that Buddhism did not go the way of Jainism, or even Brahmanism, and adopt dietary practices that are more in keeping with its ethical sensibility towards the welfare of animals. Part of the basis of this thesis is to address precisely this question. What is the status of vegetarianism in Theravāda Buddhism? Is vegetarianism considered a proper expression of the Buddha's *dhamma*? And, if not, why not? I address these questions from at least two angles: the angle of the textual tradition, and the angle of the lived tradition. In terms of the lived tradition, I focus exclusively on Theravāda Buddhism in Sri Lanka. From 2011 to 2012, I undertook ethnographic fieldwork in Sri Lanka in the urbanised and semi-urbanised districts of Colombo and Kēgalle. In this study, I explore the questions that I mention above, including other expressions of the vegetarian ideal, such as Buddha *pūjā* and *dānē* activities. The data produced from this research often contradicted the prevailing view about attitudes towards vegetarianism in Sri Lanka: a large number of informants were very much in favour of vegetarianism and attributed this idealisation to religious motives.

Similarly, I also explore the textual tradition. This study again focuses on the Theravāda textual corpus as it is traditionally understood in Sri Lanka, i.e. the Pāli canon. Again, in the course of my study of the textual tradition, I argue against the conventional view that the canon does not, in any sense, endorse vegetarianism. It is an unavoidable fact that the Buddha — as depicted in the canon — refuses to make vegetarianism mandatory, but

there is, nonetheless. an underappreciated subtlety in the canon implying that vegetarianism may constitute an ideal diet — though such a diet remains entirely optional.

In many ways, the result of this study is to expose and bring to light a number of tensions within the textual tradition and the living tradition. The textual tradition explicitly denies vegetarianism as a mandatory activity, and yet it says that we should not become butchers, that abattoirs must be avoided, and that we should all encourage the non-killing of animals; in this way, there is a strong presumption that vegetarianism is similarly recommendable. How can this tension arise in the canon? What does this mean for Buddhist ethics in general? I address these questions in turn. Similarly, the lived tradition is subject to a number of unusual tensions: non-violence is valorised as an ideal Buddhist activity and yet, at times, violence is accepted as necessary; vegetarianism is often considered ideal, and yet meat eating is common; meat and fish are generally regarded as unfit for a *buddha-pūjā* and yet it is (sometimes grudgingly) accepted that meat and fish may be given during *dānē* ceremonies.

In spite of the fact that some commentators and some informants regard the matter as closed, these tensions illustrate that this is not the case. The question of vegetarianism is a contemporaneous issue in Theravāda Buddhism, and given that the very foundations of Buddhism are themselves subject to these tensions, it is not clear that these tensions are easily resolvable. In the course of this research I will argue that the textual inconsistencies surrounding animal welfare and vegetarianism lead to contemporary problems in modern Sri Lanka. There is simply little consistent guidance on the question of whether vegetarianism should or should not be adopted.

Literature Review

There is volumous material on the subject of animal welfare in Buddhism. In this review I will restrict my discussion to just the material that is relevant for this thesis, namely material that is concerned with Theravāda Buddhism. Even then I will only look at materials relevant to the Pāli texts and Sinhala Buddhism. The former is concerned with literature related to textual studies, the latter is concerned with material relating to Sri Lankan anthropology. I have broken this section up into three parts (a) environmental literature, (b) animal nonviolence and vegetarianism literature, and (c) ethnographic literature. I discuss (a) in the most detail here mainly because (b) and (c) will be discussed in greater detail throughout the thesis – (a) does not especially concern the project, though it is certainly related to it. It would simply go outside the domain of the research project to discuss that literature in detail.

a) Environmental literature

A sizeable amount of literature has been developed concerning Buddhism and the environment. The Buddhist environmentalism literature does not often explicitly discuss the subject of animal nonviolence and vegetarianism, but rather talks generally about Buddhist attitudes towards the environment and how human beings are thought to relate to the environment. Since the thesis is exclusively concerned with specific issues concerning animal nonviolence and vegetarianism I will not discuss this particular literature in great depth but will rather highlight some of the important cases.

Donald K. Swearer (2006) has provided a useful literature review of his own which breaks down Buddhist environmental approaches into five categories: eco apologists (those writers who maintain a positive thesis about Buddhism and the environment), eco-critics (those who believe that Buddhism has a negative attitude towards the environment), eco-constructivists (those who take a critical stance towards Buddhism and the environment though believe positive implications towards the environment can be gleaned from the Buddhist position); and eco-ethicists (thinkers who utilise Buddhist principles to advocate more ethical lifestyles); and eco-contextualists (those who discuss contemporary problems where Buddhist sacred sites are threatened by industrial and commercial development or environmental disaster). This way of dividing the different positions seems helpful though I will not discuss all the cases that Swearer mentions. However, in the following a few important contributions will be discussed.

One of the key eco-critics in this discussion is Ian Harris (1994). Harris believes that there is a mistaken assumption that Buddhism entertains a positive attitude towards the environment and his article is chiefly concerned with criticising this position. Harris believes that Buddhism is deficient in its treatment of environmental ethics. He writes, "The problem here is that few of the Buddha's injunctions can be used unambiguously to support environmentalist ends." (p. 53) Lambert Schmithausen is similarly critical but believes that a positive environmental framework can be reconstructed from the Buddhist textual tradition: "Early Buddhism", he writes, "does not romanticise nature." This does not mean, he adds, that, "it is altogether impossible to establish an ecological ethics on the basis of the early Buddhist tradition." (1997, p. 22) For Schmithausen there is no automatic guidance in the canon about the environment, rather that guidance must be extrapolated (to use Swearer's terminology).

Another contribution to this discussion is the work of David E. Cooper and Simon P. James. Cooper and James provide a more positive outlook by arguing that Buddhism is "green" and maintains a favourable outlook towards the environment. Certain Buddhist virtues – such as compassion and humility - implicitly demand that we treat the environment in a respectful manner. (2005, p. 106) Cooper and James adopt a virtue ethics approach in assessing the question of whether Buddhism can maintain an environmentalist framework. This idea of Buddhist virtue ethics is of course a position originally developed by Damien Keown (see 2001a). Though Cooper and James have a positive view about Buddhism and

the environment, like Schmithausen and Harris, they also retain a text critical perspective insofar that they believe that this environmental ethic is merely indirect.

Like Cooper and James, Damien Keown has also provided a critical approach to Buddhist ethics. In terms of his applied ethics Keown has discussed the issue of the environment directly in his short book on Buddhist ethics (2005) and indirectly in his book on bioethics (2001b).ⁱⁱ As with Harris, Keown challenges the assumption that Buddhism should be automatically viewed as offering an environmentally friendly religious doctrine. He writes, "While there may be some truth to the view that Buddhism is more benign in its attitude towards nature than Christianity, the idea that Buddhism is deeply in tune with 'green' values and a natural ally of the 'animal rights' movements requires qualification." (Ibid, p. 40) Nonetheless, Keown does have sympathy for the idea that Buddhist Ethics could provide a basis for an environmentally friendly view – in this way he is in general agreement with Cooper and James as he believes that the "virtues" that Buddhism endorse also indirectly endorse environmentalism. (Ibid, p. 51)

A final commentator on the environment that I will mention here is Peter Harvey. In his work on Buddhist Ethics, Harvey's general goal is to provide a comprehensive sourcebook of information about applied Buddhist Ethics, not necessarily engage the views described therein in a critical manner (as Keown and Harris, for example, do). (2000, pp. 150-185) In this way Harvey's contribution is similar to Swearer's – the project involves illustrating the different positions one may take on the subject of Buddhist environmental ethics. However, unlike Swearer, Harvey focuses more upon canonical and textual sources in his engagement. Like, Keown and James and Cooper, Harvey concludes by observing that Buddhist environmentalism is driven, if it is driven by anything, by the virtue of compassion. (p. 185)

The general flavour of this critical literature is that Buddhist Ethics has a somewhat indifferent attitude towards the environment and that it is only through extrapolation that we are able to arrive at a position where Buddhism can be regarded as looking favourably upon the environment. Because this project is primarily concerned with animal ethics, which might be considered a sub-genre of environmental ethics (though this can be contested)ⁱⁱⁱ, I will not be especially concerned with general questions about the environment as such. So the literature I have just mentioned I will leave largely to one side (but not in every case – Keown's and Harvey's work will appear again).

b). Animals and Vegetarianism

As mentioned, this thesis is more specifically concerned with animal nonviolence and vegetarianism and this might be regarded as a species of environmental ethics. The literature around nonviolence and vegetarianism in Buddhism is also somewhat extensive. In the following I will discuss some of the important contributions in this field though I will not

discuss the views espoused by these authors in detail – that will be delayed for the thesis proper.

In terms of animal welfarism and animal nonviolence there are basically two genres of writers: those who take a critical approach to the possibility that Buddhism encourages animal nonviolence and those who take a more evangelical approach to animal nonviolence. I wish to draw the distinction in this way because even the authors who are critical generally accept that Buddhist Ethics does not encourage animal killing, it's only that these authors believe that there are some limitations to what this means. For example, these authors tend to recognise that, according to traditional Buddhism, animal nonviolence does not, for whatever reason, entail vegetarianism. Less critical authors are more willing to accept the possibility that Buddhism actively encourages animal nonviolence and often adopt a highly politicised position that is influenced by Western animal activism.

I will begin by mentioning the critical perspective. Damien Keown (2005), Peter Harvey (2000), and Lambert Schmithausen (1997). These three authors observe that animals are not always positively regarded in the canonical texts, though they all observe that animal slaughter is viewed in a negative light. They also maintain similar critical views about vegetarianism – all of them observe that meat eating is allowed according to the canonical view and so from a traditional perspective meat eating is sanctionable. The details of their views will be illustrated later. Paul Waldau (2002) is the most critical of the Buddhist position concerning animals. His central contention is that Buddhism is fundamentally speciesist – i.e. that Buddhist Ethics favours animals and is, in fact, prejudiced against animals. Waldau's view is perhaps the most critical of this group of authors.

Against this are authors who argue that Buddhist Ethics provides a positive basis for animal protection and that there is even room for a politicised animal welfare movement within the Buddhist schema. First amongst these individuals is Philip Roshi Kapleau who argues that the Buddha endorsed the idea that animals are of moral significance and that they should be protected from harm. This, he thinks, leads to vegetarianism which he believes is endorsed by the Buddha (1981). Norm Phelps maintains a similar view insofar that he favourably concludes that Buddhism endorses an animal rights perspective (2004). Tony Page is similarly enthusiastic about the possibility that Buddhism encourages an animal rights perspective (1999). Bodhipaksa has also written a book that take a pro-animal Buddhist position and in his book he vigorously defends the idea that a good Buddhist should adopt a vegetarian diet (2004). All these authors are heavily influenced by Western animal ethics literature and the style of Western animal ethics comes through strongly in their writing. For example, they all discuss the suffering animals endure through factory farming. These texts can also all be categorised as Buddhist apologetics insofar that they attempt to resolve various textual difficulties facing Buddhist vegetarianism – in particular the fact that the Buddha allowed meat eating. The critical authors above do not face this problem because they simply accept that the Buddha did allow meat eating.

The position that this thesis takes on this matter can perhaps be categorised in the former division. I take a critical attitude towards the Buddhist texts though, as per Schmithausen's constructivist approach, I also argue that a positive thesis about animals can be extracted from the canonical materials. Nonetheless, I believe that the evangelical authors described above generally maintain an unduly positive position in relation to Buddhist animal ethics. Some of my views on this matter have already been published (Stewart, 2010) (chapter 3 is based off this paper to a large degree).

c) Ethnographical literature

The final aspect of this thesis is concerned with ethnography and anthropology. As per the discussion of animal nonviolence and vegetarianism I will limit myself somewhat in providing a very detailed discussion of the literature here as this will all be discussed in greater detail in the following. I will also only discuss the literature concerned directly with animal nonviolence and vegetarianism in the case of Sinhala Buddhism.

This literature can be roughly divided into two: historical accounts of nonviolence and vegetarianism in Sinhala Sri Lanka, and contemporary accounts of nonviolence and vegetarianism in Sinhala Sri Lanka. The former is more explicitly historical while the latter is primarily anthropological. Since the former literature are mainly primary sources I will not say much about them (I will not be discussing primary sources in the literature review).

As for the anthropology literature, however, more can be said. Unfortunately, the literature on this specific topic is quite narrow, so the extent of this discussion is limited. This literature can itself be divided into two types: literature that discusses vegetarian practices explicitly and literature that is concerned with the use and consumption of meat.

In respect to this type we can begin with Richard Gombrich. In his seminal study *Precept and Practice*, Gombrich (1991) has provided some insight into vegetarian practices in Sri Lanka though he does adopt a critical approach and observes that vegetarianism is not very widely practiced. Similar observations are made by Gombrich and Obeyesekere in their joint study *Buddhism Transformed* (1988). There it is pointed out, again, that vegetarianism is popular but not typically practiced. Gananath Obeyesekere has commented on the practice of vegetarianism and vegetarian foods being offered at *pūjāva* in an early study on the subject (1963, p. 144). Similar critical remarks have been made by Seyfort Ruegg (1980, p. 238) – as with Gombrich he believes the assumption that Theravāda Buddhists typically practice vegetarianism is somewhat overstated. Martin Southwold's study of Sinhala Buddhism has also broached the subject of animal non-violence, though he does not really concern himself with the subject of vegetarianism (1983).

In terms of the second category one can look at Bruce Kapferer's study on exorcism practices in coastal Sri Lanka (1991). In that study, Kapferer discusses the role that meat plays in exorcism rituals. Similar observations have been made by Gombrich and

Obeyesekere (1988), however. In a similar vein one can look at Robert Young's historical and textual study of Sinhala folktales (1995). These folktales help shed light on attitudes Sinhala Buddhists have had to meat eating and this is particularly interesting in light of the attitudes Sinhala Buddhists had towards foreign invaders who consumed flesh. In line with this historical / anthropological approach we can consider Robert Knox and his journals (1958). He was a 17th ce sailor who became marooned in Sri Lanka – some of his notes help illuminate attitudes Sinhala Buddhists had towards vegetarianism and also the views they maintained about flesh consumption.

Most of the contemporary anthropological literature on the subject of Sinhala Buddhism and vegetarianism has been largely negative. It has been critical to the extent that it wants to debunk the notion that vegetarianism is pervasive in Theravāda Buddhism. Although it is true that the prevalence of vegetarianism is often overstated the research I have conducted shows that, at least in the case of Sinhala Buddhism, there is some indication that Buddhist motivated vegetarianism is more popular than we would otherwise be led to believe. To be fair on the authors above it should be acknowledged that none of their anthropological studies are exclusively about vegetarianism in Sri Lanka. Rather, they simply mention vegetarianism in passing. My research attempts to partly fill this lacuna in the study of Sinhala Buddhism. In terms of this ethnographic study, the general approach I have taken follows Gombrich's style as laid out in *Precept and Practice*. I believe it is an exemplar of Buddhist ethnography. Even though it is a relatively old study, much of what it says still holds true (remarkably) and it is written in a highly engaging and persuasive manner.

Methodological Considerations

The thesis is divided into two substantive parts. The first part is textual and refers primarily to the Pāli canon as a key source. The purpose of this is partly to provide a background framework by which we can contextualise the ethnographic study. Of course, examining the textual tradition is itself intrinsically interesting. Looking at the textual tradition is particularly important given the weight the Buddhist tradition places on the textual corpus. It is certainly an advisable area to study if one wants to say something about Buddhism.

The second part of the thesis is the ethnographic study proper. This aspect of the study draws upon data collected from fieldwork conducted in Sri Lanka throughout 2011–2012. The anthropological component of the study is critical: to understand the Pāli texts, it helps to consider them in context to a lived tradition, in this case, the Sinhala Buddhist tradition. In the next section, to further cement this point, I examine why this ethnographic analysis is warranted.

A note about definitions: what we call *anthropology* might simply be called *sociology* in Sri Lanka — anthropology seems to comprise the study of *other* people's societies.

Another way of thinking about anthropology and sociology is to view sociology as the study of a society narrowly through the use of a particular methodological approach, namely through the quantitative and qualitative data. The qualitative data here is usually acquired through interviews. An ethnography, on the other hand, extends this methodology by trying to capture the cultural context of the data through participant observation.^{iv} The researcher observes cultural phenomena (e.g., rituals, images, symbols) makes note of these phenomena and comments on them. A sociological or ethnographic analysis can be embedded in a theory (e.g. Marxist analysis, Feminist analysis, etc) and if it is then this can be construed as anthropology, a discipline which is theory laden. In this study, I have gathered qualitative data both in the sociological sense of collecting interview data, but also in the wider ethnographic sense by being involved in participant observation. This involvement has included the attendance of *buddha-pūjava*, *dānē* ceremonies, and other similar activities, and the result of this involvement has been described throughout the thesis.

Because of this participant observation, and in conjunction with the gathering of interview data, I regard the latter part of the thesis as truly ethnographic rather than just sociological. It might not be regarded as anthropological in the more technical sense in so far that I do not depend upon any particular theory of analysis. This can be compared with some of the anthropologists who I do study, such as Obeyesekere or Kapferer, who use a psychoanalytic approach. I will not be commenting at all on these different approaches as these different styles of anthropology do not ultimately affect my analysis.^v However, I will be using the term “anthropology” in a much looser sense than this. Throughout the thesis I will use it simply to mean ‘the study of another culture’ in the sense I describe first, but I of course accept that these definitions are all contestable.

The Ethnographic Study

The ethnographic study is a qualitative study using purposive sampling. The sample was ultimately composed of 19 lay informants and 16 monastic informants (total 35 informants). The selection criteria for the study were that the participants be both Sinhala and Buddhist; hence, non-Buddhist Sinhala peoples — such as Sinhala Christians — were excluded from the study. In addition to this division, there was a division between the laity and the clergy. Lay informants were recruited initially through a cultural insider (my co-investigator) and, after that, other informants were recruited through ‘snowballing’. Clergy were exclusively recruited through lay contacts, usually because the laity had a connection to that temple. Informants were recruited from two geographic areas: Colombo and Kēgalle.

A handful of other factors influenced selection criteria. Education, economic background, gender, sexual orientation and so on were not specially sampled for. It might have been useful to quota sample by caste, since caste could play a role in outlook, but practical difficulties prevented this: caste assignment is a sensitive business. It would have

been problematic to recruit people along caste lines without prior access to people of certain castes. Most of the informants I studied were of a high caste, but in hindsight (as I argue later in Chapter 5 and 6, see p. 180, p. 235), this seems to have mattered little. In particular this is because the majority of Sinhala people are members of the high *goyigama* caste anyway.

In terms of demographics the following tables illustrate the breakdown in terms of age, income and gender. Note that I have started age demographics from 18 since none of the informants were under 18. In terms of gender and income I have only included data relating to the laity for the following obvious reasons – the clergy had no income, and they were all men.

Table 1. Age demographics

	Lay people	Clergy
18 - 25	1	1
25 - 35	5	3
35 - 45	2	4
45 - 65	8	7
65 - 85	2	2
85+	1	0

Table 2. Income (LKR rupees per month)^{vi}

	Lay people
No income	4
>50k	8
50k – 100k	5
100k-250k	0
500k+	2

Table 3. Gender

	Lay people
Male	7
Female	12

Certain problems can be raised about the heavy focus on the gathering of qualitative data for this study. Taken as a quantitative study the project might be seen as lacking in definite conclusions mainly because the sample size is so small that no reliable inferences could be made about Sinhala culture in general. I do not see this as a significant problem, however, because almost all ethnographic studies depend upon small sample sizes. The benefit of ethnographies is not their statistical power, but rather their observational detail. Quantitative studies provide a lot of inferential power due to the scale of their sample size, but they suffer considerably from a lack of detail; qualitative studies, however, make up for this. There are also practical problems attached to conducting quantitative studies in a cross-cultural context. Qualitative studies are much easier to achieve.

Privacy played an important role in the research. All of the lay informants have been assigned pseudonyms, and all of the monks remain unnamed and are described only in terms of the position that they occupied in the temple (e.g. “the head monk at Temple B...”). All participants were supplied with an information sheet that advised them of their right to withdraw from the research at any time. They were also advised of what the research was concerned with and what the purpose of the study was. All participants were asked to sign a consent form.

It should be noted that the study received full ethics approval (ref. H0012139) at the University of Tasmania under the title *Vegetarianism and Buddha pūjā in Urban Sri Lanka*.

Of course, conducting cross-cultural research of this type involves certain risks. As Richard Gombrich observes, there is always a risk that, due to certain cultural norms, informants might only give answers that they think the interviewer wants to hear (1991, p. 44). The best way to guard against the data being biased in this way is to ensure that the line of questioning does not unduly imply that an informant should answer a question in a particular way. For this reason, the formulation of the question is vital. Another strategy is to probe further and engage the informant more fully in conversation — this will often bring up underlying views not originally expressed by the informant.

Another methodological and ethical consideration regarding cross-cultural research (and other research) in Sri Lanka is the delicate political situation there. Researchers must always be aware that Sri Lanka is a politically volatile place and that voicing unpopular or disestablishmentarian views can lead to ostracism or even physical danger. However, these threats tend to arise only in cases where political opinions are aired in public. Topics such as vegetarianism seem to be fairly innocuous, and it should also be observed that views about the war have been directly examined in other anthropological studies without any apparent consequence.^{vii}

A final methodological detail is this: all substantive interviews were recorded and most informants agreed to this as per the consent form. One monk did not want to be

recorded, and another could not be recorded for technical reasons - in both cases notes were simply taken. A transcript was subsequently produced in translation. A complete copy of the transcripts can be referred to at the end of the thesis (in Appendices 1 and 2). In analysing the transcripts in the body of the thesis, I have used a referencing system that allows readers to find the comments in context to the wider interview. The details of that system is outlined in the endnotes of the first appendix.

Setting the Scene – Colombo and Kēgalle

I wish to say a few things about the setting of the ethnographic study. As mentioned, the study was conducted in two places - the city of Colombo and the more rural city of Kēgalle.

Colombo is the largest city in Sri Lanka and is home to around 1.5 million people. Technically, Colombo is not the capital of Sri Lanka, rather Sri Jayawardanapura Kōtṭe is the capital, though it is just a suburb of Colombo. Nonetheless, Colombo is casually viewed as the capital city. Colombo is a sprawling metropolis made up of a number of suburbs (*palātha*). The suburb where most of the study took place was relatively central to Colombo's central business district. Let us call this suburb, suburb D. Suburb D can be described as 'middle class' by Sri Lankan standards. That is, most of the people who live in this suburb have white-collar office jobs, have a reasonable income and are able to maintain a reasonable lifestyle. This is not to say that suburb D is without areas of poverty. Suburb D (like many other suburbs in Colombo) is intersected by canals built by the Dutch. Along the sides of the canals poorer people tend to congregate and run down shack-like bungalows are common. This is partly owed to the potent smell of the canals – sewage sometimes runs into them. Wealthier people tend to avoid the canals for these reasons.

Most of the lay people I worked with were from suburb D — excepting the Kēgalle sample. Not all the monks interviewed came from suburb D, however, but — again, excepting the Kēgalle sample — when they were from another suburb the suburb usually bordered suburb D or was at least very close by. This was because the monks that participated in the study were generally associated in some way with the lay people that were interviewed.

Kēgalle is a township in the Sabaragamuwa province of Sri Lanka. It is 78 kilometers from Colombo. Kēgalle is very much a market orientated town and is situated in an area rich in agricultural production. For this reason, Kēgalle is a central supplier of produce and equipment for surrounding farms and villages. The area has the sensibilities of a rural township, but it has the bustle of a small city (e.g. the traffic is terrible). The area where we conducted the research was in the outer area of the Kēgalle township and was surrounded by banana plantations, coconut plantations, rubber plantations and rice paddies. For this reason, most of the population here can be viewed as blue-collar working class labourers. Most of the

labourers are involved in agricultural work, and, in accordance with this type of work, they are not necessarily well paid. The average worker here would live off just a few hundred rupees a day. For this reason, many people can be considered 'poor' though it should be remembered that expenses in these more rural areas are very low compared to Colombo.

Due to these sorts of demographics, the people in Kēgalle are generally hard workers and one does not see many *rastiyādu kāriya* in this area (lit. loiterers, aimless wanderers). Colombo, of course, is a much more complex place insofar that it is a melting pot – there are both fabulously rich people and desperately poor people living right next to one another. Colombo and Kēgalle therefore offer a useful contrast to one another and this might also help highlight differences in the data that was collected.

Roughly speaking, I spent a total of four months collecting and conducting research in Sri Lanka in 2011 and 2012 and this was done over the course of two fieldtrips. I moved between both Colombo and Kēgalle during that time. Prior to this particular field trip I spent nine months in 2008 studying Sinhala and Pāli and was also involved in some fieldwork relevant to this research during this time. Between 2008 and the 2011/2012 trip I have been back to Sri Lanka a number of other times. Not all of these trips were for research purposes, but in general these experiences allowed me to get a good sense of the areas where I might like to conduct my subsequent research.

Chapter Summary

As I mention, the thesis consists of two parts: a textual component and an ethnographic component. Both are comprised of three chapters. The first three chapters concern the position (or positions) that the Pāli texts take on the matter of animal welfare and vegetarianism. In Chapter 1, I argue that the texts speak with one voice on the fundamental wrongness of animal killing. Nonetheless, the texts do not all agree on the extent of that wrongness: for example, the *Vinaya* is much more forgiving than the *sutta* materials are. In spite of this, it is clear that animal killing is something completely disallowed by the canonical materials.

Given that animal flesh is a staple food, and given that the thesis addresses the question of vegetarianism and diet, it is necessary first of all to question where animals fit into the textual moral schema. It is similarly necessary to consider where plants fit in. Hence, Chapter 2 is dedicated to the moral status of plants. As becomes apparent, the problem of plant consumption is much more complex than might first appear. Plants seem to be described as having minimal sentiency, and this would seem to imply that they are morally relevant. Does this present any moral challenges for the Buddhist? I consider this question in the thesis in due course.

In concluding the first part of the thesis, I argue, motivated partly from findings I address in Chapters 1 and 2, that there is a *prima facie* case for vegetarianism in the Pāli textual tradition. The key observation here is that the Buddha not only demands that we not kill animals, but that we also encourage others not to as well. This implies, however subtly, that we should not entertain butcheries and abattoirs. And this, therefore, seems to entail a sort of de facto vegetarianism in turn. Yet this implication is not born out from the texts. In the end, the Buddha allows meat to be consumed, a contradiction that produces a tension in the texts: on the one hand, the texts imply that vegetarianism is necessary; on the other hand, they explicitly deny it. I consider several of the causes for and implications of this tension. In general, the textual section of the thesis helps to provide a context by which we can engage the ethnographic data.

The first chapter of the ethnography (Chapter 4) is a chapter that aims to build upon this canonical context. It is here that I introduce the case of Sri Lanka most explicitly. I consider the historical and social context of Sri Lanka in this chapter, and observe that non-violence to animals has a long history within Sri Lanka, with widespread influences originating from mainland India. One interesting consideration is that an antagonistic attitude towards meat eating is a feature of Sinhala Buddhist history stretching at least as far back as the Portuguese settlement of the island in the 16th century.

The fifth chapter is the first part of the ethnographic study proper. Here, I examine the data drawn from the fieldwork I conducted in country: interviews and media (both popular and literary) are all considered in building a picture of how lay Buddhists perceive vegetarianism. Contrary to expectations raised by previous ethnographic research, it is apparent that many informants favoured vegetarianism and directly connected it to the first precept of non-violence. Furthermore, nearly all of the informants refused to give meat and fish at their home *buddha pūjā* ceremonies, and this had a number of interesting implications as to how they viewed vegetarianism in Buddhism.

In general, then, the laity favoured vegetarianism. This contrasts with the monastic position detailed in Chapter 6. The clergy were largely ambivalent to ethical vegetarianism. For the most part, they viewed it as acceptable only from a prudential health perspective. Hardly any monk saw it as a necessary feature of Buddhist Ethics proper. There were, of course, a few unusual outliers: for example, one monk in Kataragama operated a temple that allowed only vegetarian food in the *buddha ge*, while another monk ran a cow protection society in Colombo. The latter monk was especially positive about ethical vegetarianism. I consider these outlier cases over the course of this chapter. In general, however, the monastic and lay positions were at odds with each another. I attempt to explain why this is the case towards the end of the thesis.

One of the key features of the thesis is the observation that there are tensions both within the textual tradition and within the living Buddhist tradition. The textual tradition flitters

between an implicit endorsement of vegetarianism and an explicit denial of vegetarianism; the lay community approves of ethical vegetarianism while the monastic community denies it. These tensions illustrates how Buddhist practice is not always consistent and I will argue that this inconsistency can be explained in part by referring to the canon which is itself inconsistent. It seems to me that while these inconsistencies can be resolved through reference to pedagogical doctrines such as the skilful means doctrine, I suggest that this would be an error. On this matter, Buddhist ethics simply provides uneven guidance.

ⁱ This particular extract is from Philip C. Almond's *The British Discovery of Buddhism*, p. 2.

ⁱⁱ I say "indirectly" because Keown's bioethics book is primarily concerned with human orientated questions such as abortion, medicine and euthanasia. Nonetheless, some of the materials therein broach the issue of the environment more generally.

ⁱⁱⁱ For example, such a view might imply that there is a fundamental distinction between the environment and the human. But this seems to assume that humans are not a part of the environment, or stand fundamentally apart of it, which seems on the face of things false. Further, by placing animals in the domain of 'the environment' this might imply that animals are more similar to rocks and shrubs than humans and it might then be argued that our treatment of rocks and shrubs can therefore be co-extensively applied to animals. These moves are all contestable, however.

^{iv} See, Whitehead (2005, pp. 9-19) and O'Reilly (2005, pp. 84-112) for discussions about the importance of interview and participant observation.

^v Obeyesekere and Tambiah, for example, have famously quarreled over the appropriateness of Obeyesekere's focus on psychoanalysis in his anthropological work.

^{vi} Informants earning less than 50,000 LKR per month can be reasonably construed as poor (50,000 LKR = approximately \$370 at the time of writing). 50,000 - 100,000 LKR or more can be construed as middle class. Note that some of the people listed as 'no income' are all dependants.

^{vii} See, for example, Daniel Kent's "Onward Buddhist Soldiers: Preaching to the Sri Lankan Army" in *Buddhist Warfare* (2010).

Part One: Textual Study

Animal Ethics and Vegetarianism in Pāli Buddhist Literature

CHAPTER 1 | THE HARMING AND KILLING OF ANIMALS IN THE PĀLI CANON

Many religious traditions offer conflicting advice about the issue of violence. It is generally easy to find passages in most religious traditions that both condemn and prescribe violence (the latter often being particularly directed towards heretics). Christianity and Islam, for example, can both be described as religions of peace and religions of violence, and, consequently fundamental disagreement abounds concerning whether they are pacifist or not. For example, Tolstoy insists that Christianity is an entirely pacifist religion, yet Augustine maintains that Christianity tolerates a just war theory.

Theravāda Buddhism does not differ entirely from these other religious traditions in that it does produce doctrines that — at least at first — appear fundamentally inconsistent. For example, it remains somewhat unclear whether rebirth and the *anatta* doctrine are entirely compatible. Yet the Theravāda textual tradition is consistent on at least one point, however: the texts seem to completely shun violence. To this extent, Theravāda Buddhism, or, at least, the textual tradition upon which it is based, may be one of the few religious traditions that is almost inarguably pacifistic.

The nonviolent view described in the canon extends very clearly to animals, as I argue in this chapter. The entire Pāli canon repeatedly reinforces the idea that animals are to be treated with due compassion and care and are not to be mistreated or harmed. The canon is at pains not to single out human beings as unique moral subjects. Indeed, if the Pāli texts are reliable, then we may conclude that animal welfare was clearly a matter of much importance to the Buddha. Indeed, animals feature very heavily throughout the combined Pāli literature.

This chapter looks in detail at the various ways in which animal killing is condemned in the Pāli texts. In the course of this, we naturally come across complications, difficulties and contradictions. However, what becomes obvious is that, on the whole, the early Buddhist texts strongly discourage — and, in fact, condemn — violence towards animals. This finding places us in good stead to consider, in Chapter 3, the appropriateness of eating animals: if animals should never be killed, it provides tacit support for the idea that they should not also be eaten, although I do not assume that the Buddhist texts agree unanimously with this implication. As we will see, counter to expectations, these ideas generate several complications.

I – The Place of Animals in Early Buddhist Cosmology

In considering how the texts treat animals, it is helpful to first consider how animals fit into Buddhist cosmology. This process sheds some light on how animals are positioned within the cosmological hierarchy. It is already commonly known that early Buddhism endorses a

doctrine of rebirth (*punabbhava*). Rebirth, as a doctrine, shows that the early Buddhists regarded human existence as being roughly continuous with animal existence and vice versa. On this matter, Christopher Gowans writes:

[The Buddha] did not think reason has the significance most Western philosophers have assigned to it, and he diminished our difference from animals by asserting that an animal could be reborn as a human being... (2003, p. 54).

Paul Waldau has also observed a “continuity” between animals and humans in Buddhism, and that it provides a “*prima facie* case” for an ethically sensitive account of animals. Waldau does, in due course, throw his own case into doubt; however, I seek to argue that this doubt is ultimately misplaced (2002, p. 7).

Rebirth is, of course, at the heart of this continuity. The doctrine of rebirth is predicated upon a sophisticated cosmology that presupposes distinct realms or destinations (*gati*) into which one can be reborn: “There are these five destinations. What are the five? Hell (*nirayo*), the animal realm (*tiracchānayoṇi*), the realm of ghosts (*pettivisayo*), human beings (*manussā*), and gods (*devā*).” (MN, 12.35, p. 169)^{viii} The relevant term here is *tiracchānayoṇi*, which simply means “the animal class” (*tiracchāno + yoṇi*).

As Childers notes, the term is quite often used in other contexts to denote “low” activities. For example, a low or unworthy practice (such as palmistry) would be described as *tiracchānavijj* and, similarly, unworthy talk (namely gossip) would be called *tiracchānakathā* (2003, p. 508). Linguistically, this already suggests that the animal realm is regarded poorly, which is in keeping with the general view that being born as an animal is highly undesirable.^{ix}

Indeed, being reborn as an animal is the result of the accrual of bad karma and, consequently, life as an animal is described in negative terms: “I see that on the dissolution of the body, after death, [such an immoral individual] has reappeared in the animal realm and is experiencing painful, racking, piercing feelings.” (MN, 12.38, p. 170) The *Bālappaṇḍita sutta* paints a rather unfortunate picture of animal life, noting that some animals feed on grass, while others feed on dung, while others still “born, age, and die in filth” (MN 129.18-22, p. 1020). Being an animal then is extremely unpleasant and is characterised by constant pain and suffering.^x Because of this negative picture, D. N. Jha concludes: “Early Buddhism... has a somewhat negative attitude to animals.” (2002, p. 61)

At odds with this assessment is the fact that animal metaphors are often used in order to say complimentary things about the Buddha in particular, but also about his attendants and Arahants. John Powers points out that animal metaphors are often deployed

to illustrate the strength and virility of monks, Arahants and even the Buddha himself. For example, Powers considers the Arahant Abhibhūta who, in one text, defeats Māra as easily as an elephant who shakes apart a straw hut (2009, p. 103). Awakened monks are compared to roaring lions (ibid). The *Aṅguttara Nikāya* compares monks to elephants and “thoroughbred steeds” (AN, 2.6, p. 72; also Thera, 1.2.16, p. 3). The Buddha, however, is the main focus of these various animal comparisons.

The *Sutta Nipāta* states: “‘Having broken my bonds like a bull,’ said the Blessed One, ‘like an elephant tearing a pūti creeper asunder, I shall not come to lie again in a womb.’” (S, 1.2.29, p. 4) In another passage, the Buddha is said to be a “bull among men” and to be “roaring like a lion”, i.e. roaring with the *dhmma* (S, 3.11.684, p. 85; also see Powers, p. 26). The *Udāna* describes the Buddha as “tamed, alert, perfectly trained [like an] elephant” (U, 1.10, p. 9). Elsewhere in the *Udāna*, the Buddha is compared to a bull elephant, which, sick of being harassed by amorous she-elephants, eventually abandons the herd and strikes out on his own (U, 4.5, p. 50). This is clearly a parallel to the Buddha’s own renunciation and liberation story where he abandons his family and worldly affairs.^{xi}

The texts are so rich with positive animal comparisons that I cannot list them here in any comprehensive way. The aim is rather to draw attention to the dynamic ways in which animals are positively described in the texts.

Even though human beings are clearly considered superior to animals — as per their metaphysical status — animals also possess certain properties that are admirable to humans. Elephants, for example, are strong, independent and powerful. Lions have leadership and charisma and strike fear into their enemies. A hierarchy exists among the animals and, as Gombrich notes, in Sinhala Buddhist culture, elephants are “at the top” (1991, p. 197). These and other animals are used to highlight the positive qualities found in the Buddha and in his contemporaries. By comparing the Buddha to these animals, the texts make sure to reference only noble and regal animals. The Buddha is rarely compared to less noble animals.

For example, in one *Jātaka* tale, the *bodhisatta* is reborn as a monkey. But the story is quick to point out that this was due to previous bad karma (Jat, 20, p. 54). No comment about previous karma is made for any of the other more noble animals (although there is an implicit assumption that the *bodhisatta* was born as an animal because of bad karma — animal rebirth is always the result of bad conduct). Occasionally, less noble animals are used to make negative comparisons. For example, a lazy monk is said to be “like a great hog fed on grain” (Thera, 1.2.17, p. 3).

While being an animal is considered a painful and tormented existence, animals are nonetheless viewed as having a certain degree of intelligence. Buddhaghosa discusses how dogs are capable of inference: dogs, he says, flee when someone picks up a stick, knowing that they are likely to be beaten (Atth, p. 112). He goes on to say that animals also have

memory and the capacity to interpret and find meaning in sounds (as when a master orders a dog to sit or roll over) (Atth, p. 116). It would even seem that, for the early Buddhists, many animals were more cognitively enabled than even modern science might allow. The *Vinaya* discusses the case of a group of animals (a partridge, elephant and monkey) that can not only communicate with one another, but can also organise themselves socially. They even elect the partridge as their leader and spiritual adviser. The Buddha compliments these animals on being “courteous, deferential and polite” and admonishes his disciples for not modelling similar behaviour (Vin-CV, 6, pp. 226-27). The Buddha does convey some praise for animals here. Sometimes, however, animals are simply described as raging beasts completely driven by their instincts and emotions: the raging bull-elephant Nālāgiri is one such example. Sent to kill the Buddha, Nālāgiri is described as a “fierce man slayer” who terminates his rampage only because the Buddha suffuses the beast with “loving kindness” (Vin-CV, 7, p. 273).

Notwithstanding such contrary cases, animals, while generally construed as highly sentient and intellectually well endowed, are nonetheless impoverished in one crucial way: they are unable to develop spiritually. It is said that it is “untimely” to “arise in the animal kingdom” during the time of the Buddha, presumably because animals are unable to comprehend the Buddha’s *dhamma*.^{xii}

This is confirmed in the *Bālappaṇḍita sutta*, where it is said: “There is no practising of the *Dhamma* [in the animal realm], no practising of what is righteous, no doing of what is wholesome, no performance of merit” (MN, 129.24, p. 1021). This also reinforces the importance of making the most of a human birth. A human birth, the Buddha says, is so rare that it has the same chance of occurring as a blind turtle surfacing at the end of each century and happening to put his head through a small yoke (MN, 129.24, p. 1021). It is fortunate to be a human because humans are capable of enlightenment, though Buddhaghosa adds that a human birth alone is not enough: “It does not occur without there being a concurrence of circumstances, such as existence as a human being, the rise of the Buddha, and the stability of the good law, etc.” (Atth, p. 80)

Humans, then, are exceptional in that only they are endowed with the capacity for liberation (even the gods cannot be liberated — their extreme hedonism means that they do not see suffering as a problem and thus do not bother to meditate). Note, incidentally, that this problematizes Gowans’s claim that reason is not especially important in the early Buddhist case (2003, p. 54). If we take reason to be an important condition for being able to understand the *dhamma* and thus attain liberation, then Gowans would seem to be wrong here.

The fact that animals cannot develop spiritually shows that animals are more firmly trapped in *sarīrāsāra* than their human counterparts. Is an animal’s removal from the animal realm entirely arbitrary, or can they actively do good deeds and thus direct their liberation?

The *Vinaya* suggests that, in fact, animals can engage in the veneration of the Buddha and thus produce merit that allows them to escape their fate. The *Vinaya* discussion centres on a Nāga who wishes to end his unhappy existence as a serpent and so aims to join the *sarīgha*.

Since the Buddha will not accept animals into the monastic order, the Nāga is only able to accomplish this task through deception. Through the use of magic, he transforms himself into a young man. Unfortunately, by accident, the Nāga is discovered, and the Buddha arrives to admonish him and banish him from the *sarīgha*. The Buddha says: "Indeed, you serpents are not liable to growth in this *dhamma* and discipline," (Vin-MV, 1, p. 111) thus suggesting that snakes (and surely all animals) cannot advance spiritually. Nonetheless, the Buddha does point out that things are not all that bad because, though the Nāga cannot understand the *dhamma* and cannot practise meditation, he nonetheless can participate in annual religious observances:

You, serpent, go away, observe the Observance day precisely on the fourteenth, fifteenth, and eighth day of the half month. Thus will you be freed quickly from birth as a serpent and get back to human status. (ibid)

This suggest that animals are able to participate in religious observances and thus accrue good karma, even though they are not able to develop spiritually. In one passage of the *Vinaya*, an elephant picks lotuses from a pond and gives them to the Buddha (Vin-MV, 6, p. 292). This is, of course, a conventional act of worship that produces merit. These actions seem to contradict the comments made in the *Bālappaṇḍita sutta*. There, the Buddha says that animals cannot produce merit at all. This conflicts with the *Vinaya*, but which is the more true and accurate position remains unclear, and it is difficult here to draw any definite conclusions about animal merit production. The more conservative view about animals and karma seems to be this: if they cannot produce karma, they can at least lose it by living out their time as animals, which is, essentially, penitence for past wrongs. Bad karma is lost through natural attrition, if not by doing good deeds. Leaving this issue aside, we may conclude that total liberation is reserved exclusively for human beings, because animals cannot practise meditation.^{xiii}

The fact that animals are regarded as inferior in these ways has led Paul Waldau to conclude that early Buddhism is manifestly speciesist. This is the case, he argues, in spite of the fact that early Buddhism is otherwise more sympathetic to the suffering of animals than other traditions. In making his case, Waldau notes, as I mentioned earlier, that a human rebirth is considered the most ideal rebirth of all, and this shows that animal life is considered naturally inferior (2002, p. 140). Furthermore, Waldau notes that, since being an animal is a

cosmic punishment for past misdeeds, the doctrine of karma also shows that there is a hierarchy in which animals are in a lesser metaphysical position (2004, p. 141). Waldau adds:

Both the reincarnation and karma notions also reflect the important sense of discontinuity between humans and other animals that sustains the tradition's constant, dominant emphasis on the kind of achievement which mere membership in the human species is believed to be. (ibid)

Waldau is right to regard early Buddhism as being unequal in its treatment of animals insofar as human life is considered better than animal life. But the question of whether this inequality entails speciesism is a different matter altogether. According to a Singerian analysis, speciesism would only follow if animals were arbitrarily excluded from equal moral consideration in treatment. For Singer — and for the Buddhists, too — what matters is that humans and animals have sentience in common. This means that, among other things, they can suffer. Indeed, the core of Buddhist Ethics focuses on this issue of suffering. Because of this, animals and humans should be considered equally in our moral calculations. The fact that animals are less privileged than humans in other ways does not affect the fact that they are equal in a way that does legitimately count. For example, it does not matter that animals are not able to talk or participate in our political institutions.^{xiv} It is their sentience, and ability to suffer, alone that counts.

In spite of his protests to the contrary, Waldau's own definition generally agrees with this idea. He defines speciesism as "the inclusion of all human animals within and the exclusion of all other animals from the moral circle" (Waldau, p. 38). His definition is somewhat vague, but it seems to imply that what makes a being worthy of consideration is the being's status as a morally relevant creature. If they are morally relevant, then they are to be included "in the circle." In the previous textual discussion, we find that the combined texts acknowledge that animals cannot attain liberation for the simple fact that they lack the necessary cognitive abilities. This observation alone, however, is not speciesist, and Waldau must be mistaken when he claims that it is. Similarly, although animals are prone to suffer more than humans, and even though their life is considered impoverished, it does not follow that Buddhism is speciesist. It would only be speciesist if it discriminated against animals on arbitrary grounds. Buddhism does not allow this: (many) Buddhist texts consider animals to be morally equal with humans. This point will be discussed later in the chapter (p. 30 onwards). The total defence against Waldau's charge depends upon showing that animals matter ethically and, moreover, that they matter ethically in the same way that humans do.

II – The Theme of Animal Protection

In the previous section, we generally find that animal existence is regarded as being rather impoverished. First, it is an unhappy and painful existence. Second, animals are not capable of liberation. We see in this section that the Buddha does not intend to make things any worse for animals. In accord with this intention, the Buddha preaches a doctrine of universal non-violence towards all living beings. In this section, I examine three ways in which non-violence towards animals is prescribed in the Pāli texts.

Firstly, the canon is at pains to condemn animal violence. I look at some of the broader prohibitions contained within the texts (part II). Secondly, I consider the specific rejection of professions that involve the killing of animals, such as butchers and fisherman (part III). Thirdly, I look at the general issue of Vedic animal sacrifice and the Buddha's criticism of these practices (part IV). In addition, I also consider some miscellaneous cases where animal harm is (indirectly) avoided (part V). In examining these several issues, I draw upon a wide range of relevant Pāli textual materials.

(a) The First Precept and Animal Killing

In considering Buddhist non-violence, the first natural place to turn is the first precept. Many contemporary scholars recognise that the first precept opens a door for animal welfarism in Buddhism.^{xv} The *Brahmajāla sutta* provides an excellent description of this precept through outlining the Buddha's own disposition of nonviolence: "Abandoning the taking of life, the ascetic Gotama dwells refraining from taking life, without stick or sword, scrupulous, compassionate, trembling for the welfare of all living beings." (DN, 1.1.8, p. 68) This is, in fact, a stock passage that can be found in a similar form throughout the canon.^{xvi} In line with this attitude, it is said that monks should abstain from "wounding, murdering, binding, brigandage, plunder, and violence" (MN, 51.14, p. 449).

The *Sāleyyaka sutta* insists that violence towards "living beings" (a class to which animals surely belong — see previous sections and Chapter 2) is "not in accordance with *Dhamma*." The passage reads: "Here someone kills living beings, he is murderous, bloody-handed, given to blows and violence, merciless to living beings." (MN, 41.8, p. 380; also, 114.5, p. 914) The *Sutta Nipāta* states that the good Buddhist lays aside "... violence in respect of all beings, not harming even one of them." (SN, 1.1.3, p. 4) "All beings" (*sabba satta*) surely includes animals. Indeed, non-violence towards animals extends even to very small creatures. The Buddha even announces that, like a lion, he roars with the idea: "Let me not cause the destruction of tiny creatures wandering astray." (AN, 10.3.21, p. 23) This implies that even small creatures — perhaps insects — are governed by these principles of non-violence.

In general, the *Itivuttaka* (trs. *As It Was Said*) sums up the attitude that a good Buddhist should have concerning animals and their welfare: “Who smites not nor makes others slay / Sharing goodwill with all that lives / He hath no hate for any one.” (Iti, 3.7, p. 131) This passage may be regarded as a fair indication of the pacifism entailed by the first precept, a pacifism born from a good intention lacking in hate.

Waldau argues that the first precept is vague as to what is actually being prohibited. Sometimes, Waldau says, the first precept argues against killing animals, while at other times it argues against harming animals (2002, p. 143). However, this apparent vagueness is not overly problematic, because, if we take the precept to mean the latter (non-harm only), then clearly killing is condemned (since killing an animal is a harm to it). If we only mean the former, then the killing of animals is clearly prohibited anyway, which is a central issue in endorsing vegetarianism (to be discussed later in Chapter 3).

It would be an oddity, furthermore, to condemn killing but not harming animals: it would be to suggest that a monk could kick an animal until it is nearly dead, but stop short of actually killing it. The texts are not so incoherent as to advance such a peculiar ethical position. In fact, the texts no doubt mean non-killing and non-harming alike, and the fact that they are not consistent on this point does not indicate that they mean one but not the other. Rather, the texts mean both. The general tone of the canonical texts is so wantonly pacifistic that Waldau’s concerns about vagueness seem unfounded.

(b) The Good of Abstaining from Animal Killing

So much for the first precept. Let us now further consider the virtues of non-killing in the texts. Non-killing is, in point of fact, a precondition for attaining nibbāna. The *Potaliya sutta* notes that the “non-killing of living beings” is a condition for the “cutting off of affairs” (i.e. enlightenment) (MN, 54.4, p. 467). The *Aṅguttara Nikāya* similarly regards abstaining from “taking life” as the goal of renunciant conduct, referring to it as the “further shore” (AN, 10.17.169, p. 172).

The *Potaliya sutta* goes on to explain that killing living beings prompts a number of harmful consequences: “I would blame myself for doing so; the wise, having investigated, would censure me for doing so; and on the dissolution of my body, after death, because of killing living beings an unhappy destination would be expected. But this killing of living beings is itself a fetter and a hindrance.” (MN, 54.6, p. 468)

Guilt — fear of blame (*ottappa*) — is one negative consequence of animal cruelty, as is the possibility of being reprimanded by one’s betters. Finally, being reborn in harmful circumstances is another motive to avoid animal cruelty: harming animals produces bad karma. Elsewhere, the destruction of life is similarly said to lead to being reborn in “an unhappy destination, in perdition, even in hell” (MN, 135.5, p. 1054). The idea that killing

animals will cause one to be reborn in Niraya hell is repeated throughout the canon.^{xvii} In contrast to this fire-and-brimstone view, however, the *Udāna* is less clear regarding the harms that befall an injurer of animals, saying only that such a person may not “win happiness,” while one who abstains from harming animals may ultimately attain happiness (U, 2.3, p. 14). Perhaps this is simply a more euphemistic way of stating that the harming of animals will lead one to Niraya.

Buddhaghosa tells a story that is very specific in what sorts of harm may befall a tormentor of animals. He mentions a bhikkhu who, in a previous existence, was a cowherd who tormented a reptile by trapping it in a hole without food or water for seven days. Because of this past misdeed, when the bhikkhu was reborn, he was one day similarly trapped in a cave for seven days and was unable to escape “until all the days expired” (Atth, p. 361). Buddhaghosa also relays the story of a woman who, embarrassed by the fact that a dog follows her around all day, ultimately elects to solve the problem by drowning the dog in a river. Buddhaghosa is at pains to point out that this action does not cure her of her bad karma (ibid).

Animal killing is, therefore, very bad — it leads to Niraya, rebirth in a bad existence, the attraction of negative karma, and so on. This stands somewhat in contrast to the case made in the *Vinaya*, which I discuss later (p. 29). For now, it is only necessary to note that the advice contained there shows that animal deaths are far less serious than described in the *sutta* literature.

This is odd given that the texts are at pains to show that only renunciants can be fully committed to this life of non-violence. Laypeople, unfortunately, are mired in worldly affairs and are likely to fall into evil practices, such as animal killing (which is rather bad luck, since doing so will possibly cause them to be reborn in hell). Hence:

The two of them [lay person and monk], with far different dwelling place and way of life, are not equal — the householder supports a wife and the unselfish one of good vows. The householder is not fully restrained in respect of the killing of other living creatures; the sage, being restrained, constantly protects living creatures. (S, 1.12.220, p. 25)

The fact that the layperson’s domestic state is mentioned is not without purpose: it shows that the layperson is given over to greed and desire, the very condition that leads to killing and slaughter. The renunciant, however, is in a soteriologically fruitful position. In general, it is apparent that harming animals is highly discouraged in the texts.

Instead of killing animals, the Buddha endorses universal love and compassion towards them. The fact that the Buddha has a positive plan as to how we should treat animals

— as opposed to the negative commandment: “do not kill them” — is at odds with Waldau’s suggestion that the texts are “vague” as to how one should treat animals (2002, p. 143). These are definite instructions: do not kill or harm animals, and always treat them with kindness.

The *Puggala-Paṇṇatti* states that compassion and non-maleficence to all creatures (including animals of all sizes) is a fundamental virtue of the good Buddhist. It says: “Putting away the evil propensities to injure he dwells with a heart free from ill-will; compassionate and kind to all living beings he purifies his mind of malevolence.” (PP, 4, p. 81) Buddhaghosa adds that a good Buddhist must always remember that “he who practises the immeasurables should cultivate the four states [compassion, loving-kindness, equanimity, etc.] towards *all beings* (*sabba satta*) like a mother.” (Atth, p. 262)

This compassion can even placate wild and dangerous animals. Famously, the Buddha placated the raging bull elephant, Nālāgiri, sent by Devadatta to kill the Buddha, by “suffusing the elephant... with loving-kindness of mind.” (Vin-CV, 7, p. 273) The *Aṅguttara Nikāya* tells an alarming story of a monk who is bitten by a snake and subsequently dies. The Buddha blames the death of the monk, not on the snake, but rather on the monk for not taking due care in suffusing loving-kindness to the “royal families of snakes” (AN, 4.6.67, p. 81). The same story and outcome is relayed in the *Vinaya*. There, a protective chant is mentioned. Part of the chant reads, “May all beings, all breathers, all creatures every one, / See all lucky things; may no evil whatever come.” (Vin-CV, 5, p. 148) This is what, in Sinhala, would be called a *prārthanā* or religious wish. Should these good thoughts (or “wishes”) be properly realised, then animals may even become friendly protectors. A good example of this animal protection is the story that, soon after his enlightenment, the Buddha was protected by the hood of a giant cobra and was sheltered from the elements, namely “heat and cold, flies and mosquitoes” (U, 2.1, p. 12).^{xviii}

It is evident, then, that the Buddha believes that cultivating a mind suffused with compassion and loving-kindness causes animals to become compliant and harmless. The Buddha, after insisting that monks meditate on loving-kindness to snakes, goes on to add that this should be extended to animals of every kind: “May I have kindness with the footless / With those of two feet may I kindness have / with quadrupeds may I have kindness / May I have kindness to the many footed.” (AN, 4.6.67, p. 82) This is reinforced elsewhere in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. In one passage, the Buddha states that, if one is “dear to non-humans” (*amanussānaṃ*), then one will be protected from fire, poison, and sword.

Good thoughts and intentions are, therefore, a better method of dealing with animals than the conventional wisdom of brute force and physical coercion. Buddhaghosa recounts a charming tale about an elderly monk, the moral of which is that good thoughts are a powerful prophylactic from all kinds of harm. The story concerns the Elder Piṇḍabuddharakkhita, who strays into a mountain pass to look for his missing ox. There, he is accosted by a serpent

that seizes him, binds him, and then prepares to kill him. The elder thinks: “I will cut off its head with my sharp axe,” but ultimately banishes these thoughts because he recalls the first precept of non-violence. Instead, he makes the following vow: “I will sacrifice my life, but not the precepts,” and, consequently, throws his axe away. Buddhaghosa reports that the snake immediately “released him and went away” (Atth, p. 137). The animal was placated by the elder’s good thought. The preferred way to handle animals, then, is through compassion, patience and loving-kindness, not violent domination. The importance of having a good will towards animals appears again in the ethnographic study.

We find, then, that the texts are very clear that animal killing is bad: in fact, it is downright evil. Killing animals results in torment in Niraya. The texts also reveal, in opposition to Waldau, positive instructions regarding how to deal with animals: you should not kill animals, but you should also be kind to them. If these positive instructions are not detailed enough, however, consider also the micro-management of the *Vinaya*. In combination with the *Vinaya*, which I examine next, it seems that Waldau’s vagueness claim can be problematised — perhaps even falsified. Nonetheless, there are, as I have already mentioned, some interesting differences between the *Vinaya* literature and the *sutta* literature, which I explore fully in the following.

(c) The Monastic Rejection of Animal Killing

As one would expect, the *Vinaya* provides very detailed instructions on how to deal with animals. According to that text, animals are not to be harmed at all. In fact, the *Vinaya* is so preoccupied with protecting animals that it sometimes stipulates a number of practices and regulations that may even inconvenience the monastic following them.

For example, the Buddha prohibits the construction of huts from mud because it involves “no consideration, compassion and mercy for creatures” (Vin-Pat, 2, p. 65). This is likely due to two reasons: (a) constructing bricks out of mud might upset, injure or kill animals and insects living in the mud, and (b) baking the bricks in a furnace would kill the creatures therein.^{xix} Similarly, pest and animal control represents an interesting challenge for monks in light of these considerations. In the event that monks are molested by “creeping things” (i.e. insects and the like) or “beasts of prey” (carnivorous animals, I assume), the *Mahāvagga* instructs monks to leave their residence rather than control the threat with violence, presumably (Vin-MV, 3, p. 196). They may do this even if they are otherwise bound to the stipulations that require monks to remain in their residence during the rainy season.

The *Vinaya* also insists that monks should not make use of animal hides in case it leads laypeople to the slaughtering of animals.^{xx} The *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinaya* speaks of a “depraved monk” who looks “longingly at, and thought about, [a] calf.” In asking why the monk is so interested in the calf, the layperson is told: “Sir, this calf’s hide is of use to me.” (Vin-MV,

5, p. 258) This, of course, prompts the layperson to kill the calf, tan the hide and turn it into a cloak. After being stalked by the calf's mother, it soon becomes apparent that the monk was ultimately responsible for the calf's death because the monk "incited the onslaught of living creatures" (Vin-MV, 5, p. 258).^{xxi} As a result, the Buddha prescribes that monks should not use cowhides, nor the hides of other animals, as apparel.^{xxii} Monastic robes are to be made entirely out of plant materials (in fact, the *Vinaya* requires that robes be made of refuse materials; however, over time, this requirement was relaxed, and contemporary monks are allowed to use new, manufactured robe materials).

As a monastic rule, the killing of human beings is naturally prohibited: it is, in fact, a *pārājika* offence, the highest offence of all, and entails immediate expulsion from the *sangha*. Peculiarly, ordering someone to be killed, however, only involves disciplinary action (only the actual murderer is expelled) (Vin-Pat, 3, p. 129). Merely thinking about killing, either oneself or another, is a lesser offence. The importance of intention is, therefore, relevant in considering the wrongness of killing. Aiming to kill someone is bad, but actually carrying out the deed is much worse.

Buddhaghosa elaborates on this idea at some length using deer hunting as his example. In the *Atthasālanī*, he writes of a deer hunter who announces: "I will go hunting deer." Having said this, he "gets his bow ready, twists the bow strings, sharpens the spear, eats his meal, arranges his garments — so far he has moved his bodily limbs. After he has roamed the forest the whole day he does not get even a single hare or a cat. Does this amount to immoral bodily kamma or not? It does not." (Atth, p. 119) Buddhaghosa explains that the bodily action was not evil because it did not reach "the full course of action." Buddhaghosa does note, however, that there was an intention (*cetanā*) to kill the animal. Therefore, some unwholesome karma was generated commensurate with the creation of this unwholesome intention (Atth, p. 120).

The seriousness of killing humans is obvious. Things are different in the case of animals. The *Vinaya* appears to regard animal killing as a significantly less serious offence. The Buddha stipulates that, if one builds a pit trap meant to kill a human being, but an animal falls in and dies, then it carries only the offence of wrongdoing (*dukata*) (Vin-Pat, 3, p. 132). However, this is the same penalty for the accidental killing of a human.^{xxiii} The wrongness in both cases is mitigated by the fact that the death was non-intentional. Given this legal equality, we might reasonably conclude that the intentional killing of an animal carries a similar penalty as the killing of a human: expulsion.

This inference is wrong, however, because elsewhere in the *Vinaya* we find that animal killing only entails expiation rather than outright defeat. The story that gives rise to this piece of jurisprudence involves Udāyin, a monk of some notoriety (throughout the *Vinaya* — and beyond — he is constantly in trouble with the Buddha). According to the story, Udāyin, "having shot crows, having cut off their heads, put them in a row on a stake" (ibid). The

Buddha, as a consequence of these actions, states that “whatever monk should intentionally deprive a living thing of life, there is an offence of expiation.” (Vin-Pat, 61, p. 1)

Expiation- (*pācittiya*) worthy offences are serious, but they do not involve immediate expulsion. Instead, the monk is required to issue a sincere and public apology for the action and vow not to engage in such behaviour again. In short, this act of wanton animal cruelty only earns Udāyin a serious rebuke. Less seemingly brazen acts of animal harm (such as using water that has living animals in it) carries exactly the same penalty (Vin-S, 62, p. 3).

To put this into context, consider that killing an animal is an equal offence to masturbation (Vin-Pat, 65, p. 7) or walking alone along a road with a woman (Vin-Pat, 67, p. 19). Killing a human being is a serious offence, while killing an animal is a mere behavioural imperfection. From a jurisprudential perspective, animal killing is ultimately excusable. Nonetheless, according to the *sutta* materials, killing any living creature may lead to rebirth in Niraya hell. It seems odd that the monastic punishment for killing does not square precisely with the cosmic punishment. It may even be said that the *sutta* texts do not agree with the monastic texts. According to the *Vinaya*, killing an animal is a less serious offence than killing a human, but, additionally, the degree of wrong depends on the size of the animal. Buddhaghosa argues that, in comparison to large animals, killing small animals is less morally problematic:

Among animals devoid of virtues (*guṇa*), it is a slight misdeed [to kill] in the case of a small creature, and a great misdeed in that of a large one. (Atth, p. 129)

Buddhaghosa explains that the difference in wrongness is owed to the difference in effort required to kill the animal in accord with its size (ibid). Peter Harvey confirms this interpretation in pointing out that “it is preferable to eat the meat of an animal which is less intelligent, and/or smaller, than the opposite.” (2001, p. 161) In conjunction with these comments from the *Vinaya*, we therefore find that, while killing a human is completely unacceptable, killing an animal is only very bad, and even then the degree of badness depends in large part on the size, shape and type of the animal that is subject to the killing.

(d) Monastic versus Cosmic Punishment

We are faced, then, with disagreement between the *sutta* literature and the *Vinaya* texts. In the *Vinaya*, animal killing is considered very bad and is strictly not allowed; the penalty for killing an animal is less severe than the killing of a human. In the *suttas*, animal and human killers alike are both liable to go to Niraya hell upon death.

This disagreement represents a problem of consistency. One easy way to remedy the issue is to insist that one should not compare different textual sources, but this is not how the tradition sees things. The tradition views the canon as entirely consistent, and it can, perhaps, be seen as hermeneutical duty to try to take this presumption seriously, particularly in light of the ethnography to come. I therefore venture some suggestions as to why a disparity exists between the cosmic punishment and the jurisprudential punishment.

Some possible explanations are as follows: (1) It might be that animal killers should have a chance to redeem themselves in the *sarīgha*, and thus avoid an unhappy rebirth, while monks who kill humans should be given no chance at all, since homicide is a practice prohibited by all religious traditions and is not just a Buddhist excess (such as their wanton pacifism towards animals); or (2), it is plausible that, during the Buddha's era, monks and laypeople alike did not take the threat of hell very seriously. The threat of hell might have been merely a piece of rhetorical flair. For monks, however, not following the *Vinaya* has definite, this-worldly consequences, and so is followed far more rigorously; or (3), it is possible that the *Vinaya* simply recognises the difficulty in banning the intentional killing of animals altogether. Avoiding the intentional killing of bugs and insects in ancient India would be very difficult, and if it were a *pārājika* offence, too many monks would be expelled from the *sarīgha* (since it would be very easy to accuse a monk of purposefully killing insects). On the other hand, the abstention from killing humans is a trivial requirement to follow. Gombrich reports that, although his monastic informants rejected animal killing, they nonetheless regularly slapped at annoying flies and mosquitoes and one even ordered an attendant to kill a cockroach (1991, p. 306).

This apparent inequality between animals and humans might be regarded as evidence for Waldau's claim that early Buddhism is speciesist, because the *Vinaya* regards the death of animals as being less serious than that of humans. Certainly, my analysis of the *Vinaya* shows that the Pāli texts do not treat animals and humans as being exactly morally equal; but it is, nonetheless, extremely clear that the texts absolutely prohibit any sort of violence to animals, and, in fact, actively promote compassion and tolerance towards animals. We find this tolerance to be so extreme that it is even perceived as better to be killed by an animal (according to the texts) than to raise one's hand against it. The fact that the *Vinaya* is more forgiving to animal killers than to humans may be construed as the only anomaly here, but, as I argue, this anomaly can be explained. Furthermore, even if the *Vinaya* is ambivalent about animal killing, there is certainly greater parity in the case of the *suttas* where one will be reborn in hell whether one kills a human or an animal. One cannot, after all, take the *Vinaya* as the final authority on the moral status of animals.

Finally, the fact that killing a human is worse than killing an animal is already in keeping with animal welfare literature. As previously mentioned, Singer does not regard animal and human life as equal in every way, and thinks that — as a general rule (though not

always) — killing human beings is much worse than killing an animal.^{xxiv} Tom Regan, an animal rights activist (not merely a welfarist), is compelled to agree.^{xxv} So, unless these anti-speciesism activists are themselves to be labelled specieist — a rather difficult, or at least counterintuitive, claim to advance — Waldau's case here seems thin.

In the next section, we become even further acquainted with the doctrine of non-violence towards animals. The combined textual view is so extreme that it actually endorses the complete abolition of the animal slaughter industry. It also discourages animal slaughter in orthodox Vedic libations. Given that the orthodox religion was extremely powerful and influential during the Buddha's era, it is remarkable that the Buddha was so critical of the animal slaughter industry. It is even more remarkable that he would specifically target Vedic slaughter rituals. In the following, I examine the textual evidence for the Buddha's opposition, and it becomes increasingly apparent that the Buddha, in the laying out of these regulations, had animal welfare foremost in mind.

III – Animal Slaughter and Wrong Livelihood

Right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*) is deemed to be of critical moral importance in early Buddhism. Right livelihood might be considered an exclusively lay concern since "livelihood" is sometimes thought to be a matter of what constitutes an acceptable professional occupation. In fact, the Buddha does make some effort to stipulate various different occupations that monks must avoid. Since monks are, by their very nature, prohibited from taking trades (which are worldly activities) most of these prohibited occupations are best thought of as hobbies or extra-curricular monastic activities. Gombrich explains:

Their rules forbid them to assume other religious roles. One reason for this is that monks are altogether forbidden worldly occupations: they are not supposed to earn (ideally, not even touch) money, and that prohibition epitomizes the principle that they should reduce contact with secular life [and keep such contact] to a minimum. (1988, p. 44)

In particular, the activities of interest to us here are activities that reject association with, knowledge of, or the use of, animals. For example, monks should not attend animal baiting events or other gladiatorial contests: "... combats of elephants, buffaloes, bulls, goats, rams, cocks and quail... the ascetic Gotama refrains from attending such displays." (DN, 1.1.13, p. 70) This is, presumably, because these activities count as leisure entertainment. Monks should avoid leisure activities because they would harm their monastic decorum. Note that it is not particularly clear about whether the immoral nature of animal baiting is really an issue that has much stake here — it seems that animal baiting is simply imprudent.

The importance of maintaining decorum is evidenced further elsewhere: monks should not engage in “base arts” involving, for example, palmistry, divination or dream interpretation, but also “snake lore,” “rat-lore,” “bird lore,” “crow lore,” or “knowledge of animals’ cries” (DN, 1.1.21, pp. 71-72). It is likely that these different “lores” are all derivations of magic and sorcery, something that monks are strictly not allowed to be involved in. This is partly because they distract one from proper monastic activities, and also because they are viewed as pointless superstitions. Primarily, however, it is because these activities are traditionally construed as professional occupations that deserve financial remuneration and this, as Gombrich mentions in the previous quote, is contrary to monastic decorum and regulation: disobeying these rules makes monks look bad.

In general, right monastic livelihood is less about hobbies and professions and more about correct conduct between co-brethren and the avoidance of producing scandal among the laity. Wrong livelihood, Buddhaghosa says, is a “transgression of the six training precepts” and that this transgression involves “scheming, talking, hinting, belittling, pursuing gain with gain.” (Vis, 1.84, p. 31) So, right livelihood has little to do with the treatment or mistreatment of animals and a great deal more to do with maintaining proper decorum.

Most of the time, however, discussions about right livelihood are directed towards, and concern, lay people. Many of these discussions relate specifically to animal slaughter occupations. Indeed, the fact that animal slaughter has been rejected by the Buddha has been recognised by various contemporary scholars. I. B. Horner, for example, says: “... The bloody trades, which brings animals to destruction for this purpose, by no means escapes condemnation.” (1967, p. 11) Horner, and others, draws this conclusion from passages such as these:

What kind of a person, bhikkhus, torments others and pursues the practice of torturing others? Here a certain person is a butcher of sheep, a butcher of pigs, a fowler, a trapper of wild beasts, a hunter, a fisherman, a thief, an executioner, a prison warden, or one who follows any other bloody occupation. This is called the kind of person who torments others and pursues the practice of torturing others. (MN, 51.9, p. 447)

The *Ariguttara Nikāya* has a similar list:

And how, monks, is a person a tormentor (etc.)... Herein a certain person is a butcher, a pig-killer, a fowler, deer-stalker, a hunter, a fisherman, a bandit, an executioner, a jailer, or one of any other bloody calling. (AN 4.20.108, p. 219)

In these passages, the Buddha is quite clear that he only endorses professions that do not involve animal slaughter, and that only non-violent professions will reap good rewards. Indeed, abandoning slaughtering trades is a precondition for enlightenment: “He who torments neither self in this very life is no more hungry, he is allayed, he is cool. He is one who has penetrated bliss, he lives with a self that has become Brahma.” (AN, 4.20.198, p. 220)^{xxvi}

Animal slaughter attracts many harmful consequences for the slaughterer (let alone the animal). Chief among them is torment in hell. The *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, for example, promises an unhappy rebirth for animal slaughterers. There, the Buddha says that “a hunter, bloody handed, given up to killing and slaying, void of compassion for all tiny creatures” is “cast into purgatory according to his desserts” (AN, 10.21.200, p. 185). This unhappy fate is spelled out poetically in the *Kuraṅga Jātaka*. In that story, the *bodhisatta*, who is again reborn as a deer, successfully avoids being trapped and killed by a hunter. The hunter, enraged, says, “Begone! I’ve missed you this time.” In reply, the *bodhisatta* recites the following prophetic words, which promise a swift punishment:

You may have missed me, my good man; but depend upon it, you have not missed the reward of your conduct, namely the eight large and sixteen lesser hells and all the five forms of bonds and torture. (Jat, 21, p. 58)

Similarly, in a rather surreal section of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, the text describes an encounter with a “piece of meat (i.e. a carcass) moving through the air.” The text relays: “Vultures, crows and hawks, following in hot pursuit, were stabbing at it and tearing it apart as it uttered cries of pain.” (SN, 19.2, p. 701) Using his special knowledge of past lives, the Buddha notes that the piece of flying meat was, in a former life, “a cattle butcher” (ibid).

The text repeats the same story with some variations: a former poultry butcher is a lump of meat harassed by birds; a former sheep butcher is flayed alive; a former hog butcher is constantly being cut with swords; a former deer hunter is constantly being pierced with arrows; even a former horse trainer is repeatedly being stuck with needles (SN, 19.2, pp. 702-3). We can see that the nature of the punishment is often related to the nature of the crime. Some are punished by animals, i.e. the creatures that they formerly tormented, while others are punished by their very instruments of oppression (such as swords, arrows or needles). This is in accord with the system of karma, which is usually understood to award very precise, even poetic, cosmic punishments for those who engage in immoral, un-Buddhist activities.

It is not only future spiritual impoverishment that animal slaughterers face: they also face economic deprivation. While on a walk among the Kosalese, the Buddha observes a fisherman hauling in his catch. First, the Buddha points out that the fishing trade — as a way of life — fails to bring great riches and wealth. Second, this is because “evilily minded he gloats on fish being slaughtered, being brought to the slaughter; and because of that he goes not about on an elephant nor on horseback nor in a chariot nor carriage nor feasts nor lives in abundance of great wealth.” (AN, 6.1.18, p. 217). Identical comments are made about those who kill “cattle, rams, pigs, or beasts of the forest (i.e. hunters)” (ibid). This passage is interesting for other reasons: the Buddha seems to suggest that the principal self-harm caused by the slaughter trade is poverty. Human slaughter, however (be that as a soldier, an executioner or whatever), entails a much more serious self-harm, namely that it causes one “on the breaking up of the body after death... to arise in the wayward way, the ill way, the abyss, hell.” (ibid) This squares well with the *Vinaya* passages that state that human slaughter is an offence of expulsion, while animal slaughter is merely an offence of expiation. Of course, it is stated elsewhere that the killing of any living creature leads to rebirth in Niraya (see previous). I have attempted to make sense of this conflict above.

(b) Avoiding Slaughter Professions

Animal slaughter is bad for the animal *and* for the slaughterer. Preventing animal slaughter is a virtue, however, and this even implies political action. Buddhaghosa suggests, for example, that a good Buddhist should be involved in deeds that free animals from servitude and potential death. In short, Buddhaghosa encourages the good Buddhist to engage in protest activities that even involve the destruction of private property. He writes the following:

Therein [the Buddhist] offers butter, ghee, etc., as his gift of food... has the net destroyed, the fish-trap broken, the bird-cage spoiled, effects the release of the fettered, prescribes by beat of drum the non-taking of life and does such other acts to protect life, then the thought in question is accomplished by charity. (Atth, p. 106)

These subversive activities are designed as “acts of charity”, which are intended to help liberate animals from their imprisonment. It appears that even force is justified in achieving these ends (provided that no living being is hurt, naturally).

These subversive acts show us that, in order to protect animals, the Buddhist is not meant to just behave in a passive way, but is meant to be active in the liberation of animals. We return to this idea in Chapter 4 onwards, but for now, it is enough to see that not only is

animal slaughter — as a profession — evil, but that good Buddhists are obliged to free animals from the harm inflicted upon them by these tormentors.

Note here that the slaughter trade does not only harm the animal (which is effectively imprisoned and fated to die), but it also harms the slaughterer himself. The Buddha notes variously that slaughtering leads to poverty in this life, but also to rebirth in an unhappy realm, perhaps even Niraya hell. These unhappy circumstances are, of course, a product of the negative karma produced by harming living, sentient beings. Since the good Buddhist is motivated from a position of compassion and loving-kindness, it is therefore also imperative that he avert such catastrophes from arising. Hence, the Buddha teaches people not to undertake professions of this kind, and perhaps that good Buddhists everywhere should attempt to persuade individuals to give up slaughtering trades. This is, of course, as much for their own benefit as for the animal's benefit.

(c) The *Jātaka* Texts on Animal Treatment

In closing this section, I look at several of the *Jātakas* tales. The reason I treat them separately (as I treat the *Vinaya* separately) is because the *Jātakas* are generally viewed as paracanonical texts, although the tradition itself regards the *Jātakas* as buddhavacana (the Buddha's own words). However, this seems to be only "half believed" by many Sinhala Buddhists. The *Jātakas* also offer a unique discourse on animal welfare. In particular, the *Jātakas* discuss at great length the issue of animal hunting, and, in particular, the hunting of deer, which seems to have been a favourite pastime among ancient Indian, and Sri Lankan, kings.

In the *Lakkhaṇa Jātaka*, the *bodhisatta* (i.e. the Buddha in a former life) is born as a king of the deer, and instructs his deer followers on how to avoid being caught by deer hunters during crop season. The method of this slaughter is described in exacting detail: "Anxious to kill the creatures that devour their crops, the peasants dig pitfalls, fix stakes, set stone-traps, and plant snares and other gins; so that many deer are slain." (Jat, 11, p. 35) The *bodhisatta* says: "My children, is now the time when crops stand thick in the fields, and many deer meet their death at this season. We who are old will make shift to stay in one spot; but you will retire each with your herd to the mountainous tracts in the forest and come back when the crops have been carried." (ibid) A rogue deer, however, ignores this advice, and, with a contingent of followers, strays near human habitation and is consequently killed. The Buddha, in ending the story, is quick to point out that the rogue deer was none other than Devadatta (the Buddha's rival and nemesis) in a previous life. The passage makes clear that the deer have rich emotional lives, fear death, and wish to avoid an untimely death at the hands of the hunters.^{xxvii}

A similar story is found in the *Nigrodhamiga Jātaka*. The *Jātaka* starts with King Brahmadatta, who ruled Benares. The king is described as “passionately fond of hunting, and always had meat at every meal.” (Jat, 12, p. 39) According to the story, “every day he mustered the whole of his subjects... to the detriment of their business, and went hunting.” (ibid) The deer, “at first sight of the bow... would dash off trembling for their lives” but would ultimately succumb to the blows sustained by the arrows. The *bodhisatta*, in the *Jātaka*, was a king of the deers (as in the previous *Jātaka*). His subjects come to him complaining about their slaughter at the hands of the humans.

The *bodhisatta* attempts to negotiate an agreement with the king so that he may only take one deer at a time rather than slaughtering them all ad hoc. King Brahmadatta agrees, but in time, the lot falls upon a pregnant doe to go to her death. Because of the unjustness of this, the *bodhisatta* agrees to go in her place. When Brahmadatta sees this, he is awed by this display of compassion and ultimately vows never to hunt the deer again. The *bodhisatta* is not satisfied with this, however, saying, “Sire, deer will thus be safe; but what will the rest of four-footed creatures do?” (Jat, 12, p. 40). Brahmadatta replies, “I spare their lives too, my lord.” (ibid). This leads to him sparing the “lives of all creatures”, thus essentially forcing the king to become a vegetarian. In return, the deer agree not to harass the king’s crops. Note that this story is predicated entirely on the idea of mutual negotiation as a means of avoiding conflict. We learn, in the course of both these *Jātakas*, that hunting is very bad.

The fact that the *Jātakas* are particularly opposed to hunting is important for our purposes, because it first of all adds weight to the fact that the Nikāya literature is (keeping in mind that the *Jātakas* are traditionally, at least in Sinhala Buddhism, part of the *Nikāyas*) particularly pro-animal. It is also relevant because we later observe, in Chapter 4 onwards, that laypeople are more influenced by the *Jātaka* literature than the *Vinaya*, and that this might explain why they are so opposed to animal violence.

IV – Vedic Animal Sacrifice and Buddhism

In the previous section, we examined the Buddhist attitude to animal slaughter. As expected, the texts are strongly opposed to animal slaughter. It may then be thought obvious that the Buddha was also against animal sacrifice in religious contexts. But given the cultural significance of animal sacrifice (i.e. in context to the Brahmanical religious orthodoxy), it is important to treat the issue separately. This is partly also because the texts themselves place great weight on combating orthodox Vedic ritual practices of this type, which, as Jha suggests, were very common during the Buddha’s era (2002, p. 63). (I examine the prevalence of animal sacrifice in Hindu-India in more detail in Chapter 4).

(a) Against Animal Sacrifice

Peter Harvey sums up the Buddha's attitude to animal sacrifice in the following way: "The Buddha, along with leaders of other non-Brahmanical renunciant groups, was very critical of [animal sacrifice], both because of the cruelty involved and because it did not bring the objectives the brahmins hoped for." (2000, p. 157) That the Buddha rejected animal sacrifice as part of ritual ablutions is agreed upon by a number of other modern commentators.^{xxviii}

The Buddha did not reject all types of sacrifice (*yañña*), however, but certainly rejected Brahmanic animal sacrifice.^{xxix} Hence, the Buddha says, "No, brāhmin, I do not praise every sacrifice." Yet the Buddha is not in favour of all types of sacrifice. He says, "In whatever sacrifice, brāhmin, cows are slaughtered, goats and sheep are slaughtered, poultry and pigs are slaughtered and the myriad of living creatures come to destruction — such sacrifice which involves butchery, I do not praise." (AN, 5.4.9, p. 49) The reason, the Buddha says, for his not praising this type of sacrifice is because it produces no good karma. Instead, actions that protect animals are productive of good karma.

This idea is repeated in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*. King Pasenadi is busy preparing a great sacrifice in order, as Bhikkhu Bodhi notes, to impress a young woman who has caught his eye. The text explains: "five hundred bulls, five hundred bullocks, five hundred heifers, five hundred goats, and five hundred rams had been led to the pillar for the sacrifice." (SN, 3.9, p. 171) Learning of this, the Buddha utters these verses:

The horse sacrifice, human sacrifice / These great sacrifices (*mahāyañña*), fraught with violence / Do not bring great fruit

The great seers of right conduct / Do not attend that sacrifice / Where goats, sheep, and cattle / Of various kinds are slain. (SN, 3.9, p.172)

We find here, then, further confirmation that animal slaughter does not produce the good karma that the ritualist is after. If the earlier remarks are to be believed, it may even bring great demerit. Instead, the Buddha is quick to encourage non-violence as a source of merit.

In the *Sutta Nipāta*, the Buddha describes a king who, "induced by the brahmins, had many hundreds of thousands of cows killed in sacrifice" (S, 2.7.308, p. 36). The text goes on to say: "Not by their feet, not by their horns, not by anything else had the cows harmed anyone. They were like sheep, meek, giving pails of milk. Nevertheless, the king, seizing them by the horns, had them killed with a knife." (ibid) The cows were ruthlessly killed, even though they were not guilty of any crime. The devas band together and protest the king's actions calling the sacrifice "unjust."

This violence towards cows is explained to be an “ancient practice,” but that the cows are “innocent”, and that in killing them the ritualists “fall away from justice.” There is, therefore, a moral dimension at stake here. The text does remark, however, that the non-killing of cows is also a prudent way to avoid disease: “Formerly there were three diseases: desire, hunger, and old age. But from the killing of cattle ninety-eight diseases came.” (S, 2.7.311, p. 36) It seems plausible that this latter explanation uses disease as a metaphor for moral blemishes. (Note that this anti-cow-killing discourse is a feature of both Hinduism and Buddhism, and I consider it in greater detail from Chapter 4 onwards.)

The *Aṅguttara Nikāya* adds further weight to the view that animal sacrifice is wrong. In a complicated passage, we find the Buddha describing a Brahman who says:

Let so many bulls be slain for the sacrifice; let so many cows, so many heifers, so many goats, so many rams, (let so many horses) be slain for the sacrifice. (AN 4.20.8, p. 220)

Such a person, the Buddha says, is a “self-tormentor” and the “tormentor of others”. As with general animal slaughter, animal sacrifice similarly harms the ritualist as much as it does the animal.

The ritualist accrues bad karma, while the animal is made to suffer (and die). The *Itivuttaka* is similarly critical of animal sacrifice, saying, “Monks, there are these two gifts, the carnal gift (*āmisadānañca*) and the spiritual gift (*dhammadānañca*). Of these two gifts the spiritual is preeminent.” (Iti, 4.1, p. 188) According to Childers, *āmisam* refers primarily to “flesh, meat, and food” but more generally applies to “enjoyment, temptation, lust” and so on (2003, p. 29). In the context of this passage, it seems apparent that what is being promoted is the good thought behind the gift rather than the gift itself.

The *Pāyāsi Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* is similarly critical of animal sacrifices. One of the Buddha’s chief disciples, Kassapa, discusses with Prince Pāyāsi whether animal sacrifice brings any merit. He says, “Prince, when a sacrifice is made as which oxen are slain, or goats, fowl or pigs, or various creatures are slaughtered, and the participants have wrong view, wrong thought, wrong speech (etc.), then that sacrifice is of no great fruit or profit.” (DN, 23.31, p. 366)

The passage implies, of course, that an animal sacrifice conducted with right view, right thought, right speech, etc. in mind would perhaps be justified and produce great fruit. However, we quickly learn that right view, right thought, etc. leads to an abstinence of animal sacrifice:

... When none of the creatures are put to death, *and* the participants have right view, right thought, right speech (etc.), then that sacrifice is of great fruit and profit. (ibid)

The suggestion, then, is that acting in accord with the Buddhist *dhamma* excludes the possibility of animal sacrifice.

(b) Animal Sacrifice in Context

Naturally, these comments need to be considered in their context. Buddhism was a religion that developed partly in response to the orthodox Vedic religion. The purpose of animal sacrifice, in Brahmanism, was to appease the gods and produce great merit. Creating blood libations was a key activity of the religious orthodoxy. The Buddha, in adopting a largely pacifistic religion, could not countenance the destruction of animal life in this way. Alsdorf also suggests that animal sacrifice had become simply a mindless ritual and that the Buddha viewed this its chief problem (2010, p. 50).

The Buddha, however, did agree with other forms of sacrifice. A wholesome sacrifice comes in the form of a gift or offering (*dāna*). This is generally conceived of as being practical gifts to the *sarīgha*, such as food or robe offerings. For example, the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* insists:

Worthy of gifts from those that sacrifice / In this world are the learner and adept / They walk upright in body, speech and mind / A field of merit unto them that give / And great the fruit of offerings unto them [...] (AN, 2.5.1, p. 57)^{xxx}

The verse makes extensive use of the noun *yajanaṃ*, which means “sacrifice,” as well as the adjective *āhuneyyā*, which means “sacrificial.” Childers notes that *yajati* means “to sacrifice, or make an offering in a Hindu sense” (2003, p. 594). Similarly, in the *Sutta Nipāta*, the Brahman Sela is preparing to provide a “great sacrifice” (*mahāyañño*) for the Buddha, which, of course, will be a great feast (his fellow Brahmins mistakenly believe that he is preparing a feast for a wedding) (S, 3.7, p. 70). Again, we find a traditional piece of Vedic terminology reapplied to Buddhism in an innovative way.

It is apparent, then, that the Buddha was set on adopting Brahmanical terminology to promote his own doctrine: “proper sacrifice” should be understood not to mean animal slaughter, as the Brahmins insisted, but to mean the more pacifist gift of food, drink and robes

to the monastic organisation. As with many other cases in the canonical texts, the Buddha redeploys Brahmin terminology for his own ends. This is clear in the *Sutta Nipāta*. There, a Brahmin boasts about the virtues of his sacrifice (described as a “sacrificial cake”), which he has duly placed in the ritual fires.^{xxxii} The Buddha, however, says that a truly fruitful sacrifice is one given to a virtuous person, namely a deserving member of the *saṅgha* (S, 3.4.463, p. 54).^{xxxiii} This advice is entirely prudential: only giving to such a person will produce any merit.

The fact that the Buddha does not wish to disparage all types of sacrifice is made apparent throughout the texts. For example, in referring to the nihilism of Pūraṇa Kassapa (who does not believe in karma or rebirth), the Buddha says, “Herein, a certain one holds the depraved, the perverse view that there is no virtue in almsgiving, in sacrifice, in offerings: that there is no fruit, no result of good and evil deeds...” (AN, 3.12.115, p. 247)^{xxxiii} The *Puggala-Paññatti* differs by saying: “There is merit in charity, in sacrificial rites, in sacrificial offerings.” (PP, 2.19, p. 37) Sacrifice is not always bad.

It is quite apparent, then, that sacrifice is not merely allowed; it is practically mandatory.^{xxxiv} I suggest earlier that the Buddha rejects Brahmanical animal sacrifice in particular because it involves the killing of an animal, which, as we find throughout the texts, is wrong. But there may be other reasons to reject Brahmanical sacrifice in general (animal and otherwise). In the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, it is claimed that the presumption that “virtue and ritual sacrifice suffice” is a “delusion” (AN, 7.1.1, p. 98). So, it would seem that the Buddha has doubts about the custom of sacrifice alone (or virtue alone) securing good karma. It appears that, in the orthodox religion, it was popularly thought that, if one performed the necessary libations, a good consequence would necessarily eventuate. The Buddha’s *dhamma* is different in that mere sacrifice is not enough — one must have a good intention, too. In this respect, it is possible that the Buddha’s rejection of animal sacrifice is not motivated by the fact that an animal is being killed, but rather because it represents a robotic attempt to produce good karma, ignorant of the virtue and good intention that must accompany such actions.

The Buddha may possibly have had in mind the importance of intention, but one would be hard pressed to say that he was not at all concerned with the fact that it was animals being killed. If this was not relevant, then the Buddha would either have not raised the topic of animal sacrifice at all, sticking to more generic descriptions of Vedic sacrifice (of which there were many permutations), or he would have made it clear that it was the formulaic nature of the animal sacrifice that was problematic. Given that the Buddha explicitly rejects animal slaughter in general, it seems likely that this is a substantial motivation for his rejection of the more specific case of animal sacrifice.

V – Miscellaneous Cases of Animal Cruelty

Apart from explicit examples of animal harm, more exotic instances also exist of animals being harmed. The harms in these cases are more indirect, since they do not fundamentally involve the direct killing of animals or the overt physical wounding of animals. In this section, I address the positions of the texts regarding these issues, and whether the texts regard these miscellaneous cases as direct or indirect harms to animals. One interesting feature of these miscellaneous cases is that they also provide an insight into how the texts view animals: in many cases, the wrongness of harming animals is merely instrumental.

(a) The Case of Bestiality

Perhaps one of the most apparently egregious cases of animal cruelty in the canonical texts is the reference to bestiality. An entire body of philosophical literature is concerned with weighing up whether bestiality is a harm, and, moreover, whether it is a harm to the animal or to the human. I will not be examining that literature here; instead, I assume at the outset that bestiality constitutes some kind of harm to the animal (acknowledging that this can be disputed). As we will see, the Buddha prohibits bestiality, but his reasons for doing so appear to have little to do with the animal as such. Rather, his reasons have much more to do with the harms that may befall the human violator.^{xxxv}

The *Vinaya* reveals that bestiality is a *pārājika* offence and, therefore, an act ultimately worthy of expulsion from the *sangha*. The *Vinaya* tells of a monk who, “on account of his lust kept a female monkey [upon which he practised sexual intercourse]” (Vin-Pat, 1, p. 38).^{xxxvi} While out on an alms round, another group of bhikkhus come across the monk’s quarters: “The female monkey, seeing these monks coming afar, went up to them and postured before them [i.e. exposed its genitals]” (ibid). The suspicious bhikkhus lie in wait for the offending monk and, upon his return, discover that the monk is using the monkey for the purposes they suspect.^{xxxvii}

Consequently, the group of monks confront him about it. The monk admits that there is a monastic rule against fornication, but that it refers, he says, only to the human female, not the female animal. Defeated by his reasoning, the monks retire to the Buddha to inform him of their encounter. In due course, the Buddha summons the offending monk, rebukes him, and finally clarifies the rule by saying, “Whatever monk should indulge in sexual intercourse even with an animal is one who is defeated, he is not in communion.” (Vin-Pat, 1, p. 40) Bestiality is considered a chief offence according to Buddhist jurisprudence. However, the reason for its rejection is rather more complicated.

Bestiality is wrong, not, as we might assume, because of the possibility of animal cruelty. Rather, it is an offence because it is contrary to the Buddha’s endorsement of passionlessness (*virāga*). The Buddha views bestiality as being wrong for the same reason

that any sexual act is wrong — because it increases desire, lusts and passions. Furthermore, bestiality is banned because its practice leads to much gossip and scandal among the laity (ibid). In short, the reason that bestiality is prohibited is primarily human-orientated.^{xxxviii}

The threat of bestiality is raised elsewhere in the Pāli canon. A number of cows are crossing a river near Sāvattthī when, seeing this, a group of irresponsible monks begin to disturb their safe passage. Apart from annoying the cows by catching hold of their “ears... dewlaps... and tails”, the monks also take hold of the animals’ more sensitive, and private, areas. Indeed, the *Vinaya* tells us that “they touched their private parts with lustful thoughts” (Vin-MV, 5, p. 254). Having done all of this, the monks finally kill the animals. The punishment for these offences are in accord with other passages in the *Vinaya*: for touching an animal with erotic thoughts, one is guilty of a “grave offence” (dukkata). Interestingly, killing the animal is a lesser offence than the touching of its genitals, which is merely a *pācittiya* offence that requires only an apology. This tells us that, while killing an animal is bad, what is more of a threat to spiritual development is the cultivation of lustful thoughts. Indeed, the repudiation of such thoughts is a constant preoccupation of the Pāli materials.

There is a vague allusion to bestiality in Buddhaghosa’s *Atthasālinī*. As I mention in an earlier section, Buddhaghosa recounts the story of a dog who is enamoured of a human woman and consequently follows her around all day and finally into a forest. This results in the woman being taunted: “Men scoffed at her with: ‘There goes our dog-mistress.’” (Atth, p. 361) The Pāli word here is *luddhik*, which means “hunter”, but Pe Maung Tin suggests (as per the translation) that the meaning here is “dog mistress.” This may be because *luddhikā* is related to *luddho* i.e. greedy or covetous (Childers 2003, p. 223), thus suggesting that the woman is coveting the dog.

The implication here may be that the woman — alone in the woods with the dog — is engaging in scandalous activities with the animal. This accusation would explain the woman’s humiliation and her desperation to get rid of the animal. If this is to be interpreted as a story concerning bestiality (or, rather, the unsupported accusation of bestiality), then it is also consistent with the previous stories in terms of the social disgrace attached to such trans-species liaisons. It is notable that the woman is subject to much scandal merely because she is suspected of engaging in zoophilic acts. This accusation is enough for her to want to kill the animal. At the end of the tale, it is the innocent killing of the dog that is the real disgrace, and the alleged bestiality does not even rate a mention. It is possible, in the context of the other passage, that bestiality is wrong partly because it might lead to the animal being killed out of shame.

(b) Stealing Animals and Riding Animals

Bestiality is an unvirtuous pastime, but not necessarily because it is viewed as an act of animal cruelty. This is consistent with other animal-human interactions prohibited by the Buddha. The *Vinaya* regards the theft of an animal as a *pārājika* offence in which the offender can be expelled. The text notes that this covers all sorts of animals: footless, two-footed, four-footed and many-footed (Vin-Pat, 2, p. 87). As it turns out, the theft of the animal has nothing to do with the fact that the thief is interfering with the animal, or perhaps causing it distress, but is rather because the thief is interfering with someone else's property.

Indeed, the *Vinaya* essentially accepts that animals are, at least in this capacity, merely commodities that can be traded and sold just as one can trade and sell any piece of property. A note: just as with the case of bestiality, in considering cases of animal labour, I assume that animal servitude constitutes some kind of harm to the animal because the training and labour impressed upon the animal entails a certain amount of suffering and pain. This is not to mention the suffering involved in depriving an animal of its liberty.^{xxxix}

The Buddha similarly prohibits riding animals, and thus using them as a vehicle. The *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinaya* describes the case of a group of monks who “went in a vehicle and there was a bull in the middle yoked with cows and there was a cow in the middle yoked with bulls.” (Vin-MV, 5, p. 255) Non-Buddhists and laity see monks riding with these animals and, consequently, a scandal is created. The Buddha finally rules that monks may not go in a vehicle (which presumably also covers the riding of animals). Again, the rationale here seems to have little to do with the possibility that the animal is being harmed (say, by burdening the animal or limiting the animal's freedom). The problem, rather, is the fact that riding in vehicles, and on animals, results in a lack of decorum expected of monks. Given that the use of vehicles was the domain only of the very rich, the idea that monks may ride them — having, of course, given up worldly pleasures and conveniences — is highly objectionable.

Some other passages, however, seem to look down upon animal training and animal domestication because it harms the animal rather than the humans associated with it. Concern over direct harm to animals because of animal servitude is exceptional. Vulture training, for example, is construed as a “wrong livelihood” presumably because the vulture suffers in the process of training, though it could alternatively be because vulture trainers had a bad social reputation. Given the context of the passage (vulture training is lumped in with butchers and fowlers and so on), it seems likely that the direct harm caused to the animal is the more probable explanation.^{xl}

In general, what these cases tell us is that the Buddha does not object to the use of animals as such. As I mention in the section on plants, this may partly be due to the fact that a complete abolition of animals would interfere with lay commercial activities. It would have been absolutely necessary for agriculturalists to utilise bullocks and horses as part of their labour force. Without them, agricultural production would have been compromised. Since the

sarīgha depend upon the wealth of their lay benefactors, the abolition of these animals in farming would naturally be counter-productive. It is plausible that the Buddha may have thought that the minor harms involved in training and domesticating animals were outweighed by the benefits of having a prosperous agricultural industry.

As Gregory Schopen suggests, the Buddhist monks have, historically, been competent businessmen as well as clergymen.^{xli} This entrepreneurial character can also be seen in the Buddha himself. The Buddha's canny marketing probably helped ensure that Buddhism ranked higher than Jainism among his potential lay supporters. This accounts for the fact that animals may be used as beasts of burden, but does not account for the peculiar ambivalence that the Buddha has towards animals used for sexual purposes. It is likely that this ambivalence stems from the Buddha's skeptical attitude towards sexual activity, which he regarded as universally harmful to human soteriological development. It is not that he allows bestiality, but rather that he disallows all sexual contact. In contrast to this ambivalence towards bestiality, the Buddha is quite clear that overt acts of violence towards animals are completely unacceptable. On this matter, the Buddha is largely inflexible. In the next section, I consider some reasons for this being the case.

VI – Arguments Against Harming Animals

From this discussion, we can see that killing animals, and harming them more generally, is widely objected to in the literature. But the reason and motivation for this non-harming principle is somewhat less clear and, in some cases, requires a certain degree of inference on the part of the investigator. Consequently, the reasons in defence of non-violence to animals can be divided into two types: explicit arguments and implicit arguments. In the following section, I examine these arguments more thoroughly. A note: I do not rehash the same stories, but simply refer to them directly, assuming that the reader has already absorbed the material noted in parts I–V.

(i) Explicit Arguments

The first set of arguments that I address here are the explicit ones. In the course of the previous analysis, it soon becomes apparent that many of the reasons for the non-killing and non-harming of animals are prudential. To begin with, the texts clearly point out that the killing (and perhaps even mere harming) of animals leads to the accruing of bad karma. This bad karma can result in different unhappy consequences depending on the degree and type of the offence. As we learn from the case of the animal slaughterer who is reborn as a “flying lump of flesh”, animal killers are reborn in hell. Similarly, the story in the *Jātaka* portends that the

hunter who intended to kill the deer *bodhisatta* will be reborn in unhappy circumstances. Similar examples are myriad.

Lesser offences against animals generate other unpleasant consequences. To take the example suggested by Buddhaghosa, a man who tormented a lizard was, in a later life, trapped in a cave just as the lizard was trapped by the man. On the other hand, we discover that non-harming and non-killing leads to the production of good karma, which will cause one to “win happiness”. The general argument, then, is just this: if we do not wish to reap cosmic punishment for our harmful actions against animals, we should not harm them.

This sort of argument clearly depends upon certain cultural and metaphysical assumptions. It first of all assumes that reincarnation is a legitimate possibility and, furthermore, that karma exists and has genuine metaphysical force. I will not trouble the reader with arguments for and against these doctrines. This is partly because the early Buddhist texts do not themselves take much time to defend these doctrines, but rather assumes them to be true as a matter of course. Furthermore, the believability of these doctrines is partly cultural. Since these doctrines were commonly accepted in the Buddha’s era, irrespective of religious affiliation, it is likely that fear of a bad rebirth would have held some psychological weight for everyone (they were metaphysical assumptions held between all the competing religious schools — only the materialist Cārvākas rejected these doctrines). Having said that, it is still not entirely clear how seriously these doctrines were taken. As I have already noted, although killing an animal is a capital offence from a cosmic perspective, it is only a minor offence within the context of the monastic *Vinaya*.

Apart from these metaphysical considerations, we must also consider the practical fact that killing or harming animals interferes with a monk’s career development. As we have learnt at length, the killing and harming of animals is a monastic offence that, although a lesser offence, would nonetheless constitute a blemish on the monk’s spiritual record. We find that this is in large part based upon further prudential reasons: harming animals causes the *sariṅgha* to be regarded poorly by both Buddhist and non-Buddhist communities.

Social expectation is, therefore, an important consideration in rejecting the killing of animals (as we will see, social expectation plays a significant role in the living Buddhist community). So, if one wishes to be a successful monk, then one would be advised to not harm animals, but rather treat them only with great compassion. Harming animals is not just harmful to a monk’s career; it is not good for laypeople either. We have learnt, for example, that the slaughtering trade is not economically profitable. Killing and harming animals, then, is not good for business, whether one is a monk or a layman.

Finally, there is the important matter that harming and killing animals is said to prevent one from realising nibbāna. Since the ultimate goal of Buddhist soteriology is liberation from saṃsāra (and the attendant suffering), it seems that this would be a rather

significant and important reason for adopting an attitude of non-violence towards living beings (animals included).

But even if one does not have the aspiration to become an enlightened being, a good rebirth is also predicated on non-violence. So, whether one is seeking out the primary goal of Buddhist practice, or if one is merely seeking out the ancillary goal of a good rebirth, in either case non-violence is a condition. Being a good Buddhist, according to the argument, simply requires mandatory adherence to the non-violence principle.

(ii) Implicit Arguments

These arguments are explicit reasons for adopting a non-violent attitude, but implicit arguments are evident also. Many of these implicit arguments underwrite some of the previous explicit arguments. For example, why is it that killing animals is so obstructive to liberation? Are there any non-selfish reasons for the non-harming of animals? These questions can only be answered implicitly through considering some of the factors addressed in the previous analysis.

Before we answer these questions, let us first consider the role of arguments from authority. We find it said that harming animals is “not in accordance with the *dhmma*” and that the harming of animals will lead one to be “censured by the wise”. These remarks imply that one should not harm animals simply in virtue of the fact that Buddhist sages tell one not to. It goes without saying that such authoritarian commands must be suitably investigated and verified, but as a starting point they might be considered legitimate reasons for not harming animals, especially when we consider the fact that faith (*saddhā*) is considered a necessary virtue for spiritual development and cultivation.

Another related point is that the texts repeatedly state that the Buddha (and his good disciples) simply “do not” harm, injure or kill animals. Since the Buddha is a model of good Buddhist behaviour, it follows as a matter of principle that the good Buddhist should emulate his pacifistic behaviour. This is further reinforced when we learn that non-violence is actually a condition for enlightenment. Part of the reason that the Buddha is enlightened to begin with is because he gave up participating in violent activities (which is perhaps why hunting and slaughtering are so constantly rejected).

Of course, these sorts of arguments do not reveal much: the Buddha says that killing animals is wrong, and this may motivate some to slavishly do as they are told, but more reflective people will wonder why the Buddha made such pronouncements at all. It could, as we have learnt, be because there are self-interested reasons for the non-harming of animals (karma will get you), or it might be because one just wants to follow the monastic rules (as per

the *Vinaya*). But deeper philosophical reasons must be at stake here. The answer, it seems, has to do with suffering.

As we learn throughout the canon, suffering (*dukkha*), is considered the primary evil that Buddhism wishes to combat. The central and core tenet of Buddhism is the recognition that suffering exists, and the entire metaphysical and ethical doctrine fundamentally pivots around this observation. Liberation, as it turns out, is liberation not merely from rebirth, but primarily from the suffering that attends it. I have argued that the animal realm is considered a particularly unhappy place and that it is thought that animals experience even greater, and more enduring, hardships than humans do. Animal slaughterers, and those who engage in animal sacrifice, are described as “tormentors”, partly because they torment the animal, and partly because they torment themselves with guilt and, ultimately, suffering in Niraya. The fact that “tormenting others” is considered bad only makes sense if we also assume that torment itself is bad.

This idea connects directly to the central doctrinal point that suffering is evil. It is through these passages that we find the suffering of animals to be of central and direct interest. The harming of animals is wrong, not merely because it leads to the harm of the human perpetrators, but also (perhaps primarily) because it harms the animal and causes it to suffer.

The motivation to harm and kill animals is also based upon mental states that are considered fundamentally un-Buddhist. The canon views greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and ignorance (*avijjā*) as being central obstructions to the development of liberation. This is because all three involve extreme attachments or extreme repulsions (repulsions are generally viewed as another form of attachment, however) to certain states of affairs. Killing depends on all three vices. First, the motivation to kill can depend upon feelings of greed, since there is quite often something to be gained by engaging in killing. Consider the wrong livelihood of slaughtering, for example, where there is a monetary benefit. Second, the motivation to kill can also arise from feelings of hatred. This is perhaps the most common way of thinking about killing, since killing is often perpetrated as an act of revenge or in a fit of mindless passion.

Finally, since those who kill engage in these activities generally unaware of their inner motivations, and probably unaware of the consequence of their actions (such as a bad rebirth), it can be said that they are motivated also from ignorance. These three vices are all fundamentally connected to the issue of suffering, since the canon regards these vices as a first cause of suffering. This suffering occurs not only for the direct victim (in this case, the animal), but also for the inflictor of the suffering, since they must experience the repercussions.

VII – Conclusion: Killing Animals is Wrong

Killing and harming animals is considered a wrong in Buddhism, and the reasons that I have provided in defence of this claim are multifaceted and varied. I find certain ambiguities involved in this claim: in the *sutta* literature we discover that killing animals leads to a poor rebirth (perhaps even in hell), while the *Vinaya* merely says that killing animals is an offence entailing expiation.

What is quite clear, however, is that the combined canonical materials are intolerant of animal killing, and that it is universally banned. The fact that the punishment for the crime is inconstant and ambiguous does not mean that the activity is not, in fact, a crime. For example, it is wrong to traffic drugs in Singapore and Australia, and this is the case even though the Singaporean government may execute the offender while the Australian government may supply only a light jail sentence. However, it is also important to observe just how flexible the texts are on these points: although the killing of animals is wrong, the degree to which the killing is wrong varies from case to case. It seems to me that this indicates that the Buddha — as represented in the canon — was very aware of individual situations and was aware that different situations called for different solutions. This flexibility becomes increasingly important as the thesis develops.

In any case, this general abolition of animal killing leads naturally to the question of eating animals: if animals are not to be killed, it seems to follow that they cannot be eaten. Vegetarianism, therefore, seems to be a likely outcome of these pacifist doctrines. Counter to our expectations, we learn, in due course, that the canon actually resists this conclusion. This leads to various doctrinal and monastic complications that require navigation. In Chapter 3, I argue that the fact that early Buddhism did not adopt vegetarianism had a great deal more to do with arbitrary social and political circumstances rather than any stable moral or ethical objections. Before we can examine these arguments, however, we need to consider the early Buddhist attitude to plants. The next chapter is devoted to this matter more explicitly.

^{viii} The literature also has a detailed typographical analysis of the origins of different animals and, accordingly, how they should be ultimately categorised: “Sāriputta, there are these four kinds of generation. What are the four? Egg-born generation (*aṇḍ ajā yonī*), womb-born generation (*jalābujā yonī*), moisture-born generation (*saṃsedajā yonī*), and spontaneous generation (*opapātikā yonī*).” (MN, 12.32, p. 168) The idea is that birds and the like are born from eggs, mammals are born from the womb, germs, parasites and so forth are born in moisture (“there are these beings born in rotten fish, in a rotten corpse, in rotten porridge, in a cesspit, in a sewer...”). Finally, hell beings and gods are born spontaneously without any source of origin.

^{ix} Jha agrees that, in the early texts, animal life is very unpleasant: “Like man, they [animals] are subject to suffering, and their existence is extremely unhappy.” (2002, p. 61)

^x The degree of the suffering depends in part upon the individual animal's karma, and that the different sorts of karma lead to different sorts of animal typographies. Buddhaghosa says, "In dependence on the difference in kamma appears the difference in the destiny of beings without legs, with two legs, four legs, many legs, vegetative, spiritual, etc." (Atth, p. 87) Buddhaghosa concludes by saying, "I see no creatures more variegated than the animal kingdom" (Atth, p. 88). In accordance with this, the sufferings they must endure are equally variegated.

^{xi} In one alarming passage, Powers notes that the Buddha's penis is compared to that of a bull's or an elephant's (2009, p. 13).

^{xii} The *Aṅguttara Nikāya* also notes, interestingly, that it is untimely for people to be born in the "outlying communities" and in the "middle countries" not because these people are distant from the Buddha and so are not in his presence when he is teaching them, but instead because the former are "unintelligent barbarians" and the latter because they "hold wrong views" (AN, 8.3.6, p. 153).

^{xiii} This, and many other similar observations, have been made by Damien Keown. In his book on bioethics Keown concludes that: "No animal, therefore, can be more valuable than a human being, however intelligent the animal or however handicapped the human being." (2001b, p. 48) Similar cautionary points are made by other authors such as Schmithausen: "According to these texts, animals are, firstly, intellectually inferior. Though they have the capacity for thinking (*manasikāra*) they lack the faculty of insight (*prajñā*)." (1997, p. 29)

^{xiv} A large part of Singer's seminal work — *Animal Liberation* — is predicated on the assumption that animals and humans are intellectually different (2002, pp. 13-17). Note that the Buddhist case actually makes more allowances for animal-human intellectual equality than even Singer does.

^{xv} Christopher Chapple, for example, writes: "The treatment of animals is included in the first Buddhist precept — not to harm or injure living things (*prāṇātīpātād viratiḥ*)." (1986, p. 221) Lambert Schmithausen also notes that "living beings" may never be harmed (1991, p. 1). Harvey writes: "The object of this precept [the non-injury principle] is not limited to humans, as all sentient beings share the same cycle of rebirth and in the experience of various types of suffering." (2000, p. 69) Gowans remarks: "Human beings and animals are part of the same cycle of rebirth, and we should show compassion towards both, first and foremost by not killing them." (2003, p. 177) Saddhatissa says: "In taking this precept a Buddhist recognises his relationship with all living things, a relationship so close that the harming of any living creature is inevitably the harming of oneself." (2003, p. 59) Nārada states: "A genuine Buddhist must practice this *mettā* towards every living being and identify himself with all, making no distinctions whatever." (1998, p. 176)

^{xvi} For example: MN, 27.13, p. 272; 41.12, p. 382; 135.5, p. 1054; AN, 3.6.70, p. 191; PP, 4, p. 79.

^{xvii} For example: SN, 42.8, p. 1341; 42.13, p. 1361; AN, 4.27.261, p. 257; 5.15.145, p. 129.

^{xviii} The fact that serpents are picked out in these cases is noteworthy. Gombrich remarks (and this agrees with my own observations) that killing a cobra is a particularly grave offence in Sri Lanka, since cobras are viewed as being guardians of sacred places (after the fact that a giant serpent protected the Buddha after his enlightenment) (1991, p. 197).

^{xix} I. B. Horner, in her translation notes, points these risks out herself: “This must refer to the small creatures in the mud which would be destroyed when the mud was baked.” (Vin-Pat, 2, p. 65, n. 2)

^{xx} Except if monks are stranded in border areas, presumably because there are few clothing resources available there (Vin-MV, 5, p. 267).

^{xxi} We find in the *Sutta Nipāta* that animal hides are associated with non-Buddhist ascetics: “Not the flesh of fish, nor fasting, nor nakedness, nor shaven head, matted hair, dirt, *nor rough animal skins*, nor observance of the fire ceremony, nor even the penances there are in the world for gaining immortality... purify a mortal who has not crossed beyond doubt.” (S, 2.2.249, p. 30) The *Aṅguttara Nikāya* also looks down upon those who use “antelope skins... blankets made of horsehair, [blankets made of] owls’ wings” calling them “self tormentors” (presumably because these ascetics lives of unnecessary discomfort) (AN, 4.20.198, p. 219, my italics).

^{xxii} Inciting a layperson to kill an animal for its hide is, according to the translator, a *pārājika* offence, but I am not sure that this is the case.

^{xxiii} The *Vinaya* stipulates at various points that accidental human-killing is not an expulsion-worthy offence. For example, the text gives the example of a monk who accidentally sat on boy who was on a chair “concealed by a rag” and consequently killed him. The *Vinaya* says that “there is no offence involving defeat” but, due to the carelessness involved, the monk is guilty of a minor wrongdoing (*dukata*) (Vin-Pat, 3, p. 138).

^{xxiv} An exception would be a human being who is the intellectual and cognitive inferior of an animal.

^{xxv} Consider Regan’s lifeboat scenario. Regan argues that, all things being equal, the life of a healthy human trumps the life of a healthy animal because the human has a richer, more nuanced life overall.

^{xxvi} According to the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, other sects agreed with the Buddha that the slaughter trade was immoral. The famous ascetic Pūraṇa Kassapa, for example, seemed to agree that “mutton-butchers, pork-butchers, fowlers, hunters, thugs, fishermen, robbers, cut throats, jailers, and all who follow a bloody trade” were a “black breed”, which seems to imply some negative connotations (AN, 6.6.57, p. 273).

^{xxvii} In the *Kukura Jātaka*, the Buddha is reborn as the leader of the dogs (due to past bad karma, the text is quick to point out). The king, enraged that some dogs have gnawed on his leather straps, orders that all dogs be slaughtered. This dog genocide is only averted when the dog *bodhisatta* finally persuades the king that it was his own stable of royal hounds that are responsible, not all dogs (Jat, 22, p. 60).

^{xxviii} See, for example, Horner (1967, p. 4), Ulrich (2007, p. 239), Christopher Chapple (1986, p. 218), Jha (2002, p. 63). Ulrich, in fact, notes that this was a unifying factor between the Jains and Buddhists (as does Chapple).

^{xxix} It should be noted at the outset that Brahmanical texts are themselves not entirely consistent on the virtues of animal sacrifice, and it certainly seems that the issue has led to a number of redactions of important Brahmanical texts. See Ludwig Alsdorf on this issue (2010, p. 36, etc.).

^{xxx} Note that this passage is repeated nearly verbatim elsewhere in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (see, AN, 4.5.9, p. 49).

^{xxxi} Bhikkhu Bodhi, in commenting on a passage of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, reveals that the “sacrificial cake” is “milk rice” and that there are strict regulations as to who may consume it after it has been placed in the fire (SN, 7.9, n. 447, p. 447). Hence, in the passage in question, the Brahmin is interested in the Buddha’s caste.

^{xxxii} The *Sutta Nipāta* also speaks in praise of sacrifice. The Buddha encourages a Brahmin to sacrifice, saying, “‘Sacrifice, and while sacrificing, Māgha,’ said the Blessed One, ‘make your mind clear in every respect. For one sacrificing, the sacrifice is the basis. Taking one’s stand there, one abandons one’s faults.’” (S, 3.5.506, p. 59) As above, these passages suggest that sacrifice is encouraged, provided it is done with a good intention. The robotic slaughter of animals does not serve this end.

^{xxxiii} The word *yijñam* (sacrifice) is a variant on the verb *yajati*. Childers makes this clear in his Pāli language dictionary (2003, p. 601).

^{xxxiv} Buddhaghosa similarly questions those nihilists who deny the existence of fruit produced by “sacrifice and offerings” (Atth, p. 493).

^{xxxv} As an aside: In his Sinhala Buddhist ethnography, Martin Southwold was told that most monks were expelled for breaching this *Vinaya* ruling against bestiality (1983, p. 37).

^{xxxvi} The translation of this passage is truncated in places, most likely because the translator (I. B. Horner) found the material therein too sordid and confronting. It should be kept in mind that the translation was first published in 1938. I have attempted to reconstruct the full translation from the original Pāli.

^{xxxvii} The monkey is said to have been “shaking its waist and moving its body” (*kaṭṭhampi cālesi cheppampi cālesi*), which perhaps implies that the monkey performed a seductive dance.

^{xxxviii} John Powers recounts this *Vinaya* story in his own work and comes to a similar conclusion (2009, p. 96).

^{xxxix} Naturally, I recognise that these assumptions can be disputed, but it would deviate from the purpose of the thesis to examine these complicated issues in full. For the present moment, I assume that a loss of liberty (etc.) constitutes a potential harm for an animal.

^{xl} A former vulture trainer turned renunciant is viewed with particular contempt by the Buddha for following heretical views (Vin-CV, 1, p. 35). Oddly, only vulture trainers are singled out. Other animal trainers seem to be acceptable professions (provided they don’t kill the animal).

^{xli} The idea that early Buddhist monasticism was deeply indebted to business practices is argued by Schopen throughout his *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters* (2004).

CHAPTER 2 | PLANTS AND FOLIAGE IN THE PĀLI LITERATURE

Plants play a significant role in the Pāli canonical literature. Understanding the moral status of plants is critical for this investigation, because it helps to determine what constitutes an appropriate diet for Buddhist monastics. If a plant has sentiency, and is morally relevant, then this would pose a considerable problem not only for any argument in favour of vegetarianism in Buddhism, but also generally: how is the good Buddhist meant to survive at all? In the course of this investigation, I argue that plants are construed as having sentiency, but that it is a minimal sentiency, which is highly diminished in comparison to animals and other higher order beings. Consequently, while plants are owed some level of respect in accord with this minimal sentiency, using them in day-to-day monastic affairs is generally allowable. Unlike the Jains, then, the Buddhists have a more nuanced (perhaps rational) view about the use of plants.

I – Lodging with Trees, Living in Forests

The myths and legends surrounding the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, ministry and death are heavily invested with plant imagery and, in particular, with the image of the tree (*rukḥha*). As far as the texts are concerned, the Buddha seems to be something of an arborophile. This affection for trees is evident throughout the canonical texts. Here we look at the Buddha's relationship with trees, and the reasons why the Buddha looked favourably upon them.

(a) Buddha the Arborophile

The Buddha, it is claimed, was born under a sāla tree. According to the legend, his mother, Yasodharā, gripped its branches as she gave birth to the infant Gotama. His enlightenment experience — which represents perhaps the most important moment in Buddhist legend — occurred on the banks of the Nerañjāla under a *bodhi* tree (U, 3.10, p. 39).^{xlii} The *bodhi* tree is sometimes referred to as the Buddha's "throne" and often simply as "the wisdom tree", thus denoting its purpose and origin (Atth p.16, p.21, p. 43).^{xliii} The *banyan* tree also plays a role in the Buddha's life: soon after his enlightenment, the *Udāna* (*Verses of Uplift*) reports that the Buddha was resting under a *banyan* tree when he was approached by a Brahmin asking about the true nature of the virtuous life (U, 1.4, pp. 3-4).

Buddhaghosa also mentions that the Buddha spent some time at a goatherd's *banyan* tree, and also a whole range of other trees (Atth, p. 44). Again, soon after enlightenment, the Buddha sits at the base of another tree — this time the *mucalinda* tree — when he is approached by the Nāga king, Mucalinda, for protection (the breed of tree appears to be named after the Nāga king) (U, 2.1, p. 12).^{xliv} The Buddha also later takes up at the foot

of “a lovely sāḷ tree” in order to meditate (U, 4.5, p. 49). In general, lodging at the foot of a tree is a key activity in the Buddha’s own life and legend.

Forests generally also play an important role in the Buddha’s story. In the *Sutta Nipāṭa*, the Buddha stays in Icchānamkala forest, and he is visited there by many “distinguished and wealthy brahmans” (S, 115, p. 74). In fact, the Buddha stays at numerous forests and glades, and lodges at numerous trees throughout his monastic career. A key residence is Jeta Park, donated by the wealthy merchant *Anāthapiṇḍika*. Mango groves are also a place of lodgement (DN 33.1.1, p. 479). Similarly, the Bamboo Grove at Rājagaha is a location that the Buddha and his followers often frequent (Vin-CV 5, p. 204). The *Vinaya* reports that the Buddha used a *kakudha* tree to stretch out his robe for drying (after having gained permission from the *devatā* that inhabits the tree) (Vin-MV, p. 38).

Elsewhere it is said that the Buddha preaches the *dhamma* at a woodland grove and sits at the “base of a certain tree” (Vin-MV, p. 38). These sorts of general phrases are very common in the literature. The *Atthasālinī* reports that, soon after his enlightenment, the Buddha composed the *Abhidhamma* at the foot of the Pāricchattaka tree (Atth, p.1, p. 19, p. 40). Malalasekere reports that the Pāricchattaka tree is in the Tāvatiṃsa heaven. So, not only does the Buddha have affection for ordinary trees, he also has an affection for celestial ones, too (Malalasekere, p. 191).^{xlv} The Buddha is also said to have stayed at the Rājayatana tree for seven days soon after his enlightenment (Vin-MV, p. 5).

This affection for trees was evident right up until his death. The *Mahāparinibbāna sutta* notes that the Buddha, in his final days, stayed “at the foot of a tree” (DN, 16.4.21, p. 257). Buddhaghosa clarifies that the Buddha in fact expired beneath “two sāḷ trees”, which is fitting given that he was also born under one (Atth, p. 22). This is supported by the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, which states that it was, indeed, two sāḷ trees in Kusinara under which the Buddha expired, and that it was a grove owned by the Mallas (AN 4.8.76, p. 88; also Jat, 95, p. 231). What is clear from all of this is that trees play an enormous role in the Buddha’s life story. Not only do they play a role in the more unremarkable events of the Buddha’s life, but they also serve a role during the more remarkable times: trees play an important role at the birth of the Buddha, at his enlightenment, and also at the time of his death.

(b) Forest living as a means of renunciation

Trees also feature in respect to the monastic community as depicted in the canon. Meghiya, a monk, is accosted with evil thoughts and desires while he is sitting at the foot of a mango tree (U, 4.1, p. 42). This is consistent with the Buddha’s own story: while sitting at the foot of the Bo tree prior to enlightenment, the Buddha is tempted by Māra. Elsewhere, a group of monks, after having taken up alms, sit underneath a pavilion made of *kareri* trees (U, 3.8, p. 36). Living among trees, then, is an important part of the renunciant life both for the Buddha and

for his disciples. It is a space in which renunciant activities can take place. Why are renunciate activities facilitated best in the forest?

As we see above, the Buddha is much enamoured by the power of the forest hermitage. The purpose of such forest retreats are, it would appear, to gain solitude (*viveka*) and quiet so that meditation and the purification of the mind can take place. Hence, the *Sutta Nipāta* says that, “Intent on meditation, firm, he should be delighted in the grove. He should meditate at the foot of a tree, delighting himself.” (S, 709, p. 88)^{xlvi}

Renunciation (*nekkhama*) is aided by living in close proximity to the forest, and solitude is an important condition for the cultivation of the renunciant’s life (S, 718, p. 89). (Ironically, even though the Buddha enters forests for this purpose — such as the Icchānamkala forest previously — he is nonetheless constantly bombarded by streams of visitors who disturb the Buddha from his retreats.) One of the purposes of monastic life is, of course, to renounce worldly affairs. For example, it is said that a monk “disgusted [with ordinary existence]” finds resort in “a lonely seat, or tree, cemetery, cave or mountain” (S, 958, p. 118).

This idea of renunciation and solitude is strongly encouraged in all of the canonical literature. The Buddha, ultimately, embodies the ideal. The Buddha, for example, says:

I have been secluded and have spoken in favour of solitude; I have been aloof from society and have spoken in favour of aloofness from society. (SN 16.5, p. 667)

Kassapa, a chief disciple of the Buddha, then goes on to explain the advantages of forest dwelling. Principally, his dwelling in a forest will cause future renunciants to cultivate “energy” (*virīya*) in their endeavours, and they will speak in praise of the Buddha and Kassapa himself (*ibid*). This connection between forest dwelling and solitude is similarly expressed in the *Sutta Nipāta*:

As an elephant with massive shoulders, spotted, noble, may leave the herds and lives as it pleases in the forest, one should wander solitary as a rhinoceros horn. (S, 1.3.53, p. 6)

Buddhaghosa, in quoting the Mahā Nidessa of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, speaks favourably of the idea that “it is proper for an ascetic to be a tree root dweller or an open-air-dweller” (Vis, 1.68, p. 26). The *Rukkhadhamma Jātaka* discusses how the *bodhisatta*, reborn as a tree spirit,

advises his fellow tree spirits to take residence in trees that are closely grouped together, i.e. in forested areas. Some do not listen and take up residence in trees near “the haunts of men”, and so come to live “outside villages, towns or capital cities” (Jat, 74, p. 182). It quickly transpires that their decision was foolish: a hurricane sweeps the area and destroys all of the sparse trees located in the urban centres. The *bodhisatta* and his retinue, however, are well protected in their forest. This *Jātaka* can easily be interpreted to imply that monks should live isolated in forests, and that urban centres are locations of great spiritual risks.

The *Mahāgosīṅga Sutta* is similarly positive about forest recluseship: “... A bhikkhu is a forest dweller himself and speaks in praise of forest dwelling.” (MN 32.7, p. 309) These comments are made in the context of the Gosīṅga Sāla Tree Wood, and this wood is praised by one of the Buddha’s chief disciples, Moggallāna. He says that the Gosīṅga Wood is:

delightful, the night is moonlit, the sāla trees are all in blossom, and heavenly scents seem to be floating in the air.” (MN 32.9, pp. 309-310)

The Buddha agrees. Elsewhere in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the Buddha explains how he, as a *bodhisatta*, is resolved to “resort to remote jungle-thicket resting places in the forest as one of the noble ones with livelihood purified.” (MN, 4.7, p. 103) These points are continued elsewhere in the *Nikāya* literature. The *Aṅguttara Nikāya* finds the Buddha insisting that “of lodgings, monks, the root of a tree is a trifling thing” (AN 4.3.27, p. 29). In the *Lakkhaṇa Jātaka*, a group of deer (*migā*), which are depicted as being good Buddhists (albeit unknowing, perhaps), live primarily in a large forest glade (Jat, 11, p. 36). They later take refuge there from hunters (though the hunters ultimately abuse the forest and “beat the trees, bushes, and ground with sticks” in order to frighten the deer living therein) (Jat, 12, p. 39). Many *Jātaka* stories feature the Buddha as an animal living in a forest.^{xlvii}

All of these positive comments certainly paint a favourable image of forest renunciation, and, in fact, seem to recommend it as a practice. But this idea is maintained throughout the entire canon. The *Vinaya* also speaks favourably of forest renunciation. There, the Buddha is reported to have said the following:

Herein, monks, a monk goes to the jungle, going to the foot of a tree, going to a lonely place, sits down cross-legged with [his] back erect, having caused mindfulness to be present in front of him. (Vin-D, 3, p. 122)

We can see in this excerpt that forest renunciation aids mindfulness. In this respect, the Buddha endorses forest renunciation as a practice that is particularly effective for monks who have not given up every vice (MN 5.29, p. 112).^{xlvi} Even the *Apaṇṇaka Jātaka* (quoting the *Dhammapada*) mentions the virtues of forest renunciation: “They’re manifold the refuges men seek / The mountain peak, the forest solitude.” (Jat, 1, p. 3) The *Itivuttaka* goes so far as to say that solitude (perhaps in a forest — it is not specified here) will cause the right thoughts to arise in the renunciant’s mind in an almost spontaneous way:

If ye so dwell [in seclusion]... this same train of thought will much occupy you: What is unprofitable? What has not been left behind? What have we left behind? (Iti, 2.1, p. 138)

This all indicates that forest seclusion is an important feature of the monastic life. A close proximity to plants, it would appear, has a calming effect. Indeed, we get the distinct impression that the natural habitat of the monk is not the built environment, but the forest.

(c) Monastics and Worldly Existence

The idea is, perhaps, that a close proximity to an urban environment is likely to cause distractions and temptations for the monks. This idea of solitary existence is often construed as an act of independence. Consider the Buddha’s advice to Cunda: “Dwell with yourself as your own island, with yourself as your own refuge, with no other refuge.” (SN, 47.13, p. 1644) Relying entirely upon others for liberation is obstructive to the Buddhist path. Realising liberation (*bodhi*) is a personal enterprise that depends primarily upon one’s own efforts. Hence, the Buddhist path is one of independence and solitude.

Solitude does not just involve physical disconnection from society, but also in mental solitude and the independence that follows from it.^{xlix} To this extent, social obligations are a hindrance to the Buddhist path. The idea that society is a threat to the Buddhist renunciate is made clear where the Buddha says that he speaks in favour of “social isolation”, but it is also clear from his own actions. The Buddha, it should be recalled, abandoned his family so that he would have no attachments to worldly affairs. Consequently, the Buddha is critical of the having of a wife and child, which he views as an “encumberment” (U, 6.2, p. 79). Michael Carrithers supports this idea:

Properly speaking, the *Vinaya* texts allot monks no role at all in society. In their view the *Saṅgha* is self-referring and autonomous, and the question is rather what role society plays in fostering the *Saṅgha*. (1983, p.142)^l

The forest represents, for the Buddha, the physical realisation of this ideal of societal separation.^{li} It is a place free from human habitation and is, therefore, an ideal place to engage in monastic pursuits (the Buddha also speaks favourably of other isolated locations: caves, mountains and cemeteries are all suitable places for habitation). Reginald Ray supports the idea that the Buddhist ideal was originally concerned with forest recluship. He points out that the Buddha's original monastic ideal was nomadic and solitary. He writes:

The Buddha took up a life of wandering, wearing a robe obtained by chance, begging for food from door to door and... never stayed long in any one place. (p. 64)

Ray contrasts this lifestyle with that of the more sedate lives of the contemporary *saṅgha*. He contrasts modern urbanised monks with the monastic ideal of the Buddha: "The Buddha himself was a forest renunciant. It may well be that originally all his *śramaṇa* disciples were also forest renunciants." (p. 397)

Of course, the forest renunciant ideal is complicated by its optionality and the fact that monks are also proximate to an urban environment. Forest renunciation is explicitly not a compulsory activity, even though the Buddha appears, in places, to recommend it.

The *Vinaya*, for example, merely says, "Whoever wishes, let him be a forest dweller." (Vin-S, 10, p. 298) When Devadatta — a rogue disciple of the Buddha — recommends forest renunciation as a mandatory activity, the Buddha rejects this suggestion (Vin-CV, p. 277). The Buddha, in fact, states that a monk may lodge at the foot of a tree for only up to eight months per year (Vin-Pat, 15, p. 239). This is possibly because the Buddha believes that some contact with the laity is necessary for lay spiritual growth, even though mixing socially is a risky endeavour for the monks.

In general, the Buddha insists that, although forest renunciation may be a useful tool for the renunciant, it provides no guarantee of success on the Buddhist path. For example, the Buddha notes in the *Anaṅgaṇa sutta* that, if a monk cultivates "evil unwholesome wishes", even though he may be a "forest dweller, a frequenter of remote abodes [...] a refuse rag wearer, a wearer of rough robes", nonetheless, all will see that these "evil wishes" remain unabandoned (MN 5.29, p. 112).

That the forest does not guarantee success is highlighted in the *Vaṇṇ upatha-Jātaka*. Here, a story is told of a novice who is preparing for ordination (*upasampadā*), and, “retiring to a forest, he passed there the rainy season; but for all his striving during the three months, he could not develop a glimmer or an inkling of insight.” (Jat, 2, p. 9)

(d) The Dangers attached to the Forest

We should not think that the forest is universally described as an exclusively positive space. In the *Sutta Nipāta*, we are introduced to a place called the Asipatta Wood, which is located in the Niraya hell. Wrong doers...

... enter that sharp Asipatta wood, and their limbs are cut to pieces. Seizing their tongues with a hook, pulling them backwards and forwards, [the hell keepers] strike them. (S, 3.10.673, p. 84)

This image of the Asipatta wood is graphically depicted at the Aluvihāra temple near Mātale, Sri Lanka. A mural there shows hapless victims impaled on a tree with razor-sharp branches. Back in the terrestrial realm, the *Na/ apāna Jātaka* similarly describes a forest rife with mortal danger. The *bodhisatta* (who, at times, was a monkey king) warns his subjects thus: “My friends, in this forest there are trees that are poisonous^{lii} and lakes that are haunted by [a demon].” (Jat, 20, p. 55)^{liii} Similar dangers lurk in a forest described in the *Pañcāvudha Jātaka*. The forest is “haunted by an ogre (*rakkhaso*)” and the *bodhisatta* wants to enter it (Jat, 55, p. 137). Quite often, the forest is the home of robbers and bandits (e.g., Jat, 59, p. 146; Jat, 67, p. 164).

The image of the forest, then, is not universally a space of peace and calm; there is a dark side to this otherwise romantic picture. This negative appraisal of forest dwelling might be explained in light of the Buddha’s own enlightenment experience. Solitude brings with it potential for enlightenment, but also the risk of being exposed to temptations. The Buddha, during his enlightenment experience, was tempted by Māra, the god of desire and death. This occurred at the foot of the *Bodhi* tree. It seems to imply that the solitude of the forest brings with it the potentiality for enlightenment as well as the risk of harm through temptation. The various ogres, bandits, monsters and so on in the previous stories may be metaphors for temptation — just as Māra himself is the arch metaphor of temptation.

Another problem with forest renunciation is that the urban environment is a source of constant attraction for the monk. As Richard Gombrich points out, however desirable forest

reclusheship may be, the monk is always being coaxed back into proximity to the urban environment due to his dependency upon the laity:

As I have shown, the ascetic virtuous is constantly being nudged back to normal comforts by the 'relentless piety' of the laity who shower him with donations. (1988, p. 156)

Gombrich also notes that the Buddha was very much an urbanised teacher, in spite of his favouring of the forest environment, since we find throughout the Pāli canon that he repeatedly visits major urban centres, in particular Benares. This, Gombrich thinks, is partly because the Buddha's religion appealed in particular to disenfranchised city folk: "... In the Buddha's day the dominant strata of urban society were not catered for, not even recognized, by Brahmanism." (1988, p. 56) Carrithers says that, in Sri Lanka, forest reclusheship is an exceptional practice in which only isolated sects place much stock. As Carrithers observes, it is typically a modern movement (1983).

A great tension exists, then, between the Buddha's ideal of solitude and independence and the reality of social interaction and social dependence. It is noteworthy that, even when the Buddha takes refuge in the Icchānamkāla forest, he is nonetheless disturbed by many "distinguished and wealthy Brahmins" who come to pay homage to him. This is precisely indicative of the tension that is at stake in respect to the monastic ideal. The "foot of the tree" is both a vehicle for liberation and a place of possible distraction. This tension over the monastics' relationship with plants arises elsewhere in the canon, both in terms of the inconsistent plant metaphors that are deployed and, more importantly, in the inconsistent practices authorised by the Buddha.

II – Plant Metaphors and Parables

Because of the significance of the Buddha's enlightenment experience, the *Bodhi* tree has subsequently come to represent the Buddha's enlightenment, and has acted as a metaphor both for the deep rootedness of the enlightenment experience and for the strength and robustness of the Buddhist doctrine. It also acts as a metaphor for the doctrine's capacity to shelter beings from suffering.

The importance of the image of the *Bodhi* tree in Buddhist literature cannot be overstated, and this importance also extends to the living tradition. In Sri Lanka, *Bodhi* trees are sacred and may not be cut down. The ancient Sri Lankan city of Anurādhapura contains the Sri Maha *Bodhi* tree, which, it is claimed, was transplanted to Sri Lanka from India as a clipping from the original *Bodhi* tree in Bodhgaya, in the state now known as Bihar.

Consequently, the Sri Maha *Bodhi* is a major Buddhist pilgrimage site both for indigenous Sinhalese Buddhists, but also for Buddhists all around the world.^{liv}

One of the key plant metaphors in the canonical literature is the metaphor of the fruit (*phalā*). Fruit is routinely used to explain, for example, the operation of karma. Like fruit, karma matures and reaches a point where consumption is necessary. Although karma is sometimes described as being sweet — like a fruit is — it is quite often cast in a negative light, too. This is because the term “fruit” can carry an ambiguous connotation when it is taken just to mean “result” (*vipāka*). Although the metaphor of fruit is sometimes used negatively, insofar as one’s negative karma can and must ripen just as a fruit does, it is more often used simply as a synonym for “benefit.” For example:

‘Bhikkhus, when these seven factors of enlightenment have been developed and cultivated in this way, seven fruits may be expected.’ (SN 46.3, p. 1572)^{lv}

These “fruits” all turn out to be highly beneficial for the renunciant: in stages, one discovers seven different types of knowledge. The use of the term “fruit” in the literature is so persistent that it, in many ways, stops being a metaphor and starts becoming a piece of technical terminology that is simply a rich synonym for karma, benefit or result — or all of these things at once.

Fruits are an important metaphor, but so are trees. The Buddha is sometimes compared to a tree. In the *Atthasālanī* (*The Expositor*) Buddhaghosa says that “the Buddha is like the pith of a tree, his disciples are like branches and leaves.” (Atth, p. 7) In short, the Buddha is the essence and root of the Buddhist doctrine, and the *saṅgha* fundamentally depend upon him for growth, since he nurtures the *saṅgha* through the dissemination of the *dhamma*. In a similarly positive vein, young monks are compared to seedlings and, as with the previous simile, the Buddha is viewed as a source of nutriment for these novices:

Venerable sir, just as when young seedlings get no water there may take place in them some change or alteration, so too, venerable sir, there are new bhikkhus here, just gone forth, recently come to this *Dhamma* and Discipline. If they get no opportunity to see the Blessed One, there may take place in them some change or alteration. (MN 67.7, p. 561)

The use of plants and trees as a vehicle for understanding the role of conditionality is used elsewhere, again in a positive way:

Monks, [...] just as in the case of a tree, possessing branches and foliage, the shoots thereof come to maturity, so likewise the bark, the sapwood and the core; even so, monks, when mindfulness and self-possession are present, conscientiousness and fear of blame are the efficient cause of possession of mindfulness and self-possession. (AN 8.81, p. 220)

In keeping with these points, Alison Findly ultimately suggests that tree imagery can act as “metaphors for spiritual growth” (2002, p. 262). The metaphor of the lotus flower (*paduma*) is a staple image in Buddhist literature, and this certainly extends to and covers the Pāli literature too. In the Pāli literature, the lotus is usually used in the form of a simile. The Buddha, for example, notes: “... just as in a pond of blue or red or white lotuses, some lotuses that are born and grow in the water thrive immersed in the water without rising out of it, and some other lotuses that are born and grow in the water rest on the water’s surface, and some other lotuses that are born and grow in the water rise out of the water and stand clear...” So too do some beings have “clear faculties” and “dull faculties” and “much dust in their eyes” and “little dust in their eyes” (MN 26.21, pp. 261-262). In a *Jātaka* story, the Buddha is described as “opening the lotus of his mouth, as though it were a casket of jewels.” (Jat, 1, p. 2) His voice is described as being “sweet” (i.e., like the fragrance of a lotus flower).

Elsewhere, the Buddha speaks of lotuses that thrive immersed in cool water and that these lotuses are just like monks who thrive in the cool *dhamma* and who thus come to realise liberation (MN 39.17, p. 368). The lotus is a metaphor for liberation and the potentiality that beings have for liberation. It is a flower that rests in ponds and rises to the surface of the pond as it blooms, just as beings who achieve enlightenment rise above the mire of worldly existence to achieve their full potential. As described by the Buddha, some beings are more capable of this than others — just as some lotuses are coloured in different ways.

Findly also notes that positive plant imagery plays a role in the Pāli canon. In discussing the *Theragāthā*, she notes that “the renunciant is asked to shake off unvirtuous characteristics as the wind shakes off leaves of a tree” and that a renunciant should “dwell alone like a tree rejected in the woods “ (2002, p. 262). She goes on to point out that this text further encourages the idea of a “forest sentiment”, and that this involves the renunciant becoming “as a tree on a mountain top which shoots up well watered by fresh rain.” (2002, p. 262) For Findly, these sorts of images “give pattern to renunciant life”, and, consequently, aid in guiding monastic conduct. Hence, for Findly, plants play a positive role in monastic education and pedagogy.

Until this point, we might be inclined to conclude that plants are generally used in a positive way in the Pāli literature's parables and metaphors. Another of the key metaphors used by Buddhist writers is the image of the thorny bush or bamboo thicket. These images are often used as a vehicle to convey the risks and dangers of ordinary life and the propensity we have for becoming caught and snagged on desires and attachments, just as a thorn may catch our clothing and lead us to pain and suffering. Hence:

Suppose a man would enter a thorny forest. There would be thorns in front of him, there would be thorns behind him, [and all around him]. He would go forward mindfully, he would go back mindfully, [he would go everywhere mindfully], thinking 'May no thorn prick me!' So too, bhikkhus, whatever in the world is of a pleasing and agreeable nature is called a thorn in the Noble One's Discipline. (SN 35.244, p. 1249)

Similar to the case of the thorny forest is the bamboo thicket, which threatens to trap us or cause us to become lost. The Buddha says:

A tangle inside, a tangle outside, / This generation is entangled in a tangle, / I ask you this, O Gotama, / Who can disentangle this tangle? (SN 1.23, p. 101, SN 7.6, p. 259)

Buddhaghosa unpacks this metaphor by explaining that this idea of a "tangle" (*jaṭṭā*) is like a metaphor for the "network of craving." He says, "For that is a tangle in the sense of lacing together, like the tangle called network of branches and bamboo thickets, etc...." and "as the bamboos, etc., are entangled by the bamboo tangle, etc., so too this generation, in other words, this order of living beings, is all entangled by the tangle of craving." (Vis. 1.1, p. 1)

This metaphor is often extended to the case of the jungle. Buddhaghosa, this time in discussing wrong views, compares them to a dangerous jungle or forest, or even like an empty and inhospitable plain: "[It is] like a wilderness infested by thieves and wild beasts, of sand, waterless, without food." (Atth, p. 336) Elsewhere, Buddhaghosa, drawing upon a passage from the *Dhammapada*, relays that "a forest is likened to a strong craving as being a jungle where obnoxious trees have grown up." (Atth, p. 469) Forests and jungles, therefore, can operate as negative analogies, too, and this reflects the observation that, while forests and jungles are places of renunciation, they also carry their own risks.

This idea that craving and greed entraps and snares unwary persons is extended to the case of the creeper vine, which possesses an "enveloping" action (Atth, p. 472). The *Sutta Nipāta* even says that "consideration for sons and wives is like a very wide-spreading

bamboo tree entangled with others.” (S, 1.3.38, p. 5) Wives and sons are sources of craving and are, therefore, “thorns” and “snares” that tangle one in worldly life. The Buddha counsels instead that one should be “like a young bamboo shoot not caught up with others, one should wander solitary as a rhinoceros horn.” (ibid) The Buddha, of course, conquered these difficulties: he has, like an elephant, torn the “*pūti* creeper asunder” and thus has freed himself from languishing in the undergrowth (S, 1.2.29, p. 4).

Cutting down plants (*bhūtagāma*) and trees and crushing seedlings also plays an important metaphorical role in the Pāli literature.^{lvi} For example, the *Sutta Nipāta* says:

Whoever having cut down what has grown, would not plant new growing things, and would not bestow moisture upon it, him they call a solitary wandering sage. (S, 1.12.207, p. 24)

Likewise, the *Sutta Nipāta* also states:

Having considered the fields of activity, having crushed the seed, he would not bestow the moisture of affection upon it. That sage indeed, seeing the end of birth and death, leaving speculation behind, is not counted. (S, 1.12.209, p. 24)

The idea here is that seeds and plants are cut down or destroyed, which prevents them from growing. This is compared to the renunciant who has given up worldly affairs, followed the dhammic path, and thus has destroyed the conditions for rebirth. The “seed” (*bijā*) is, therefore, a metaphor for karma, which grows and, like a fruit, ripens. Hence, the *Sutta Nipāta* reports that a buddha has had the “seeds of rebirth destroyed” because his karma has been extinguished (S, 2.1.235, p. 28). The cutting down of plants also features heavily in the *Nikāyas*. A key plant metaphor is that of the palm tree:

[...] Just as a palm tree whose crown has been cut off is incapable of further growth, so too, the Tathāgata has abandoned the taints that defile... done away with them so that they are no longer subject to future arising. (MN 36.47, p. 343)^{lvii}

It is similarly said that the Buddha has cut the defilements off at the root and “made them like a palm stump”, thus preventing future rebirth (MN 49.30, p. 429, MN 68.7, p.568). In the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha boasts that “those *āsāvas* (defilements) in me are abandoned, cut off at the root like a palm tree stump, made non-existent, of a nature not to arise again in future time.” (AN 4.3.36, p. 44) The cutting down of trees, then, serves as a positive metaphor for how enlightenment can be attained. But, by all accounts, the metaphor is a negative one, at least from the side of the tree, since the tree is ultimately destroyed.

The simile of a dying plant also finds its place in the literature. The *Vinaya*’s *Bhikkhuni-vibhāṅga* — the section devoted to the analysis of nun conduct — compares the defeated nun to a dead leaf. Hence, it is said that, just “as a withered leaf freed from the stalk cannot become green again, so a nun, knowing that a nun has fallen into a matter of defeat... becomes one who is not a recluse.” (Vin-Pat, 2, p. 167) This is similar to the case of the palm tree that cannot grow when its top has been cut. But, while the palm tree is used to show that absent conditions lead to the elimination of rebirth, the simile of the withered leaf is meant to show how a nun who engages in grossly wrongful conduct can never be reconciled with the *sariṅgha* again. “Defeat” (*pārājika*) precisely means that the nun or monk is banned from monastic life permanently. There is no chance of reconciliation, and this is similar to the fallen leaf that can never again be reconciled with the plant stem.

Do any of these metaphors provide any insight into telling us how Buddhism stands in regards to the treatment of plants and trees? The answer is ambiguous. The metaphors and similes deployed in the canonical literature are unsystematic in their treatment of plants and trees. Sometimes plants and trees are compared to positively appraised mental states and behaviours, and, consequently, plants and trees are cast in a positive light, too (as in the case of the lotus flower or the ripening fruit). Just as often, however, we find that they are compared with negative states of affairs, states of affairs that obstruct the renunciant on his path to enlightenment (such as the tangled bamboo thicket or the thorny forest).

We find, then, that plants and trees are compared to obstructive states just as much as they are compared to states that promote renunciation and enlightenment. To this extent, the metaphors and similes are, at best, neutral in terms of supplying us with information about whether Buddhism has a pro-attitude to plants and trees. What it does tell us, however, is that plant and tree metaphors and similes are widely used in the Pāli literature and speak to the fact that the Buddha was highly acquainted with all things botanical. It also shows that the Buddha clearly thought deeply about the meaning and importance of plant life. In the next section, we find that he has quite a lot to say explicitly regarding the issue of how a good Buddhist should treat plants and trees.

III – Rules Concerning the Treatment of Plant Life

In the previous sections, we consider some of the ways in which the Buddha and his fellow renunciants have comported themselves to plants and trees, and, moreover, how the literature itself regards foliage through its use of metaphors and similes. The observations drawn from these investigations have all been necessarily implicit. In the following, I look at the explicit rules laid out by the Buddha that stipulate how a renunciant should behave in his relation to plant life. The *Vinaya-piṭṭaka* is absolutely a key text in this section, since it contains the Buddha's most direct set of behavioural guidelines.

Nonetheless, the Buddha also makes a number of pronouncements in the *Nikāyas*, and I in turns, examine those texts, too. In general, we find that the Buddha is highly critical of those who needlessly destroy or injure plants or trees. The *Brahmajāla sutta* states that followers of other sects are:

addicted to the destruction of such seeds as are propagated from roots, from stems, from joints, from cuttings, from seeds, the ascetic Gotama refrains from such destruction. (DN 1.1.11, p. 69)

The *Kandaraka sutta* similarly states that a renunciant “abstains from injuring seeds and plants” (MN, 51.14, p. 449). This concern for seeds and roots is reflected partly in the Buddha's monastic stipulation that monks may not dig up the ground. The *Vinaya* reports that a group of “foolish” (*mōgha purisa*) monks had the ground dug up while they were making repairs to their abodes. The Buddha scolds them by saying: “How can you, foolish men, dig the ground and have it dug? For, foolish men, people having [living consciousness]^{lviii} are in the ground.” (Vin-Pat, 10, p. 223) The Buddha rules that disturbing the earth intentionally in this way is a *pācittiya* offence, an offence that requires expiation (it is not a cardinal or *pārājika* offence). This passage is concerned with “living beings in the ground”. We see that this could refer to insects or it could refer to insects and seedlings and roots. Digging in the ground might overturn seeds and consequently cause them to fail to sprout. So, if we take this passage to include seedlings and roots, this would agree with the directive from the *Brahmajāla sutta*.

The Buddha is not just concerned with seedlings and roots, but also with more fully formed plants.^{lix} The rainy season presents special problems for those worried about harming plants, since it is during this time that seeds begin to sprout and the Indian country becomes lush with foliage.^{lx} Given that, during the Buddha's day, his disciples were prone to wandering the country-side and that this might inadvertently cause the injury of many plants, the Buddha stipulates that, during the rainy season, the monks should enter into a state of retreat to avoid “trampling down the crops and grasses, injuring life that is *one facultied*, bringing many small

creatures to destruction” (Vin-Par, 39, p. 320). The same ruling is repeated more or less identically in the *Vinaya’s Mahāvagga* (Vin-MV, 3, p. 183). The *Puggala-Paññatti* (*Designation of Human Types*) makes similar prescriptions: “He [the monk] refrains from doing injury to the forms of life whether in the germinal or grown up state.” (PP, 4, p. 80) This passage could be related to animals as much as plants.

Elsewhere in the *Vinaya*, the Buddha requires that monasteries (*vihāra*) be fenced off so as to prevent animals from entering the precinct and thus injuring “the little plants” (Vin-CV, p. 216). Some of these passages are ambiguous, of course: “life that is one facultied” could refer to plants or it could refer to small animals. I examine what this might mean in another section, but for now it is clear from this passage that avoiding trampling grass and plants is good. The reason for its being good (to avoid trampling plants because it avoids harming creatures living in the grass and plants, or because it avoids harming the plants themselves, or both) is a matter that will be resolved in due course.

Harming trees is also an activity subject to much jurisprudence. The *Vinaya* states that the cutting down of trees is a *pācittiya* offence (an offence of expiation). The ruling arises because a reckless monk takes to chopping down a tree in Āḷ avī. They soon discover that the tree is the residence of a *devatā* (a minor god), who kindly asks them to please stop. The text continues: “This monk, taking no notice [of the protests of the *devatā*], cut it down, and in doing so, struck the arm of the *devatā*’s son.” (Vin-Pat, 11, p. 226)^{lxi} This activity angers the *devatā* residing therein, who considers killing the monk, but instead simply lodges a complaint with the Buddha. The Buddha agrees with the *devatā*’s outrage saying “How can these recluses, sons of the Sakyans, cut down trees and have them cut down? These recluses... are harming life that is one facultied.” (ibid)

A similar issue arises in the *Kulāvaka Jātaka*. There, the highest of the gods, Sakka, is riding in his chariot to meet the Asuras in battle. In the course of the riding, his chariot tears up the Forest of the Silk-Cotton Trees, thus upsetting the Garuḷ as that reside there.^{lxii} Sakka wonders what the origins of the screams are and is told: “Sire, it is the united cry of the young Garuḷ as in the agony of their fear, as their forest is uprooted by the rush of your chariot.” (Jat, 31, p. 80) Sakka then resolves that he will sacrifice himself to the Asuras rather than “so act as to destroy life” (Jat, 31, p. 81). This comment is as ambiguous as the *Vinaya* passage: Sakka could be worried about the life of the vegetation he has destroyed, or he could be worried about the lives of the Garuḷ as who live in the forests and tree tops. The Buddha makes the “destruction of vegetable growth” (*bhūtagāma*) a *pācittiya* offence (ibid, p. 227). The same idea is repeated elsewhere: in deciding where to build a hut, it is mandatory that a monk build his hut in such a way that it does not lead to the destruction of vegetation (Vin-Pat, 6, p. 256).

In general, what is relevant in all these cases is that the Buddha (and his representatives, such as Sakka, etc.) believes that the tree should not be cut down. Whether

this is because the tree has direct worth, or whether it is because it harms another being (such as the *devatā* or his son or the Garuḷas) is a matter that I consider later on (p. 83).^{lxiii}

Another case where the Buddha objects to harming trees can be found (again) in the *Vinaya*. The story is that a group of monks set a forest on fire. The Buddha rules that setting forest fires is an offence of wrongdoing (*dukatta*). But the wrongness appears to have less to do with the worth of the trees, and more to do with harming the *sarīgha*'s reputation insofar as monks might be compared to arsonists (Vin-CV, p. 193). Furthermore, the Buddha allows for forest fires to be lit only if they are to counter an existing fire (*ibid*).

Even animals should not destroy plants. The *Nigrodhamiga Jātaka* discusses a story about a group of deer that disrupts plant harvesting by eating all of the crops. Recognising that this harms the human beings, the leader of the deer resolves the problem non-violently when he declares: "Henceforth, you shall not eat the crops of others." (Jat, 12, p. 41) Since the deer are portrayed as good Buddhists (albeit unknowingly), this further implies that the destruction of plants is not good. *Ārāmadūsaka Jātaka* discusses the case of a novice who "pulled up all the young trees" in a pleasure park and "gave [others] too little or too much water." Consequently, the trees "withered and died off" (Jat, 46, p. 118). The Buddha is greatly displeased with this course of action.^{lxiv}

For monks, harming trees and plants on purpose is merely a *pācittiya* offence — serious, but not a complete threat to monastic existence (accidentally harming plants carries no penalty at all). The only way in which a monk could engage in a *pārājika* activity involving plants is if he were to steal a plant. In fact, the possibility of tree theft actually comes up in the *Vinaya*. From a legalistic perspective, the degree of offence is proportional to the degree with which an offender completes the act of theft. In the case of trees:

Intending to steal, he fells it, for each blow there is an offence of wrongdoing. With one still to come, there is a grave offense; when that blow has come, there is an offence involving defeat [...] (Vin-Pat, 1, p. 86)

It is clear, however, that the harm involved in cutting down a tree is, in this context, because the tree belongs to someone else and the offender is stealing it. The theft itself is the cause for defeat, not the fact that the tree is harmed — though, presumably, if the tree were not owned by anyone, the monk would still be subject to a *pācittiya* offence for the reasons just described.

Obviously, then, we see that plants, trees and even seeds, should not be harmed by the renunciant. We even find that monks may not themselves plant trees and flowers (Vin-CV,

p. 14). Doing so requires that the monks be put on probation. This might lead one to think that the renunciant is not permitted to actually use the products of plants, trees and seeds for fear that they could be caught up in the destruction of these living beings. In fact, this is not the case.

Although the *Vinaya* stipulates that monks may not wear sandals made from wood, Palmyra leaves, marshy date palm, *muñja* grass^{lxv}, *tiṇa* grass^{lxvi} or *kamala* grass^{lxvii}, it is not due to concern over the destruction of the plants in question. In the case of the three grasses and the marshy date palm, the objection is that these plants are used for ornamentation, for “the practice of ornamenting shoes in a variety of ways” (Vin-MV, p. 243). Ornamentation is, of course, a vain activity to be eschewed by legitimate monastics. In the case of Palmyra leaf shoes, the objection is that “people think that there are living things in trees” and wearing shoes made from Palmyra leaves might offend those superstitious, occult-minded, people (Vin-MV, p. 252).

Wooden shoes present a different set of problems. According to the text, wooden shoes were banned because a group of six monks used them during their morning walk, and the shoes consequently made a huge racket that disturbed other renunciants (Vin-MV, p. 250). In all of these cases, it is clear that the destruction of plants was not relevant in considering why they ought not be used. I explore this oddity in greater detail in the following section.

Although the *Vinaya* bans the use of various plants in the composition of sandals and footwear, it does allow their use in the composition of other items. For example, the Buddha states that “a grass matting” (*tiṇa*) may be used for spreading robe material on the ground (to prevent the robe from becoming soiled), and that bamboo (*veṇu/ve/ u*) may be used to prop robes (same reason) (Vin-MV, p. 406). Mattresses may be made from “wool, bark, *tiṇa* grass, and leaves” (Vin-CV, p. 211). “Squatting mats” may be similarly composed (Vin-MV, p. 210). Various plant materials may be used in the building of monastery roofs (Vin-CV, p. 216). Roots, stems, bark, leaves, flowers and fruits may be used to make dye in order to improve the colour of faded robes (Vin-MV, p. 405). When drawing lots to decide who should perform certain duties, *kusa* grass should be used (Vin-MV, p. 405).

Furthermore, even though monks are required to not harm roots or seeds (see earlier), we find that monks may use them. In particular, monks are permitted to use roots and grasses in the composition of medicine (Vin-MV, p. 271). Similarly, medicine may be made from fruits and the leaves of plants (Vin-MV, p. 272). In general, the consumption of vegetables and fruits is clearly regarded as permissible. For example, the Buddha endorses the eating of vegetables (*ḍāka*) and also the products of grains, such as flour (*piṭṭ ha*): “I allow you, monks, all kinds of vegetables and all kinds of sold foods made with flour.” (Vin-MV, p. 344) The Buddha also provides a very detailed list of permissible drinks, which include:

... mango juice, rose apple drink, plantain drink, banana drink, honey drink, grape drink, edible lotus drink, [and] *pharusaka* [a type of berry] drink. (Vin-MV, p. 339)

Drinks made from corn are banned, though the reason for this is not specified. In general, eating fruits seems to be perfectly permissible (Vin-MV, p.289, p. 347). Clearly, plant matter may not only be used in the composition of essential objects, such as shoes, mats and the like, but may also be consumed in food products..

Another tension exists, then, in the canonical literature. On the one hand, plants, trees — and even seeds and roots — are not to be damaged or destroyed. We even learn that, as a precaution, digging in the dirt is disallowed. On the other hand, the Buddha allows monks to use plant materials in the construction of monastery structures and essential items like mats and mattresses. Vegetables and fruits are considered legitimate consumables. Roots can be used in medicines and food. So, while monks may not destroy or harm plants, trees, seeds and roots, they may nonetheless use plant products. The rub, of course, is that to use these plants, etc., they must first be killed and uprooted. Therefore, the monastic rules demonstrate a tension concerning the treatment of plant life. In the next section, I examine the nature of the moral status of plants, and begin to consider how this peculiar tension may be reconciled in the Pāli literature.

IV – Getting to the Root of the Matter: Plants and Morality

We have already seen that the *Vinaya* and other texts contain clear guidelines that prohibit the injuring or destroying of plants, trees, seeds and roots. This is complicated by the fact that renunciants are nonetheless permitted to use the products of these plants thus warranting their destruction. This raises the possibility that there is a tension in the canon over the destruction and non-destruction of plants. To clarify this problematic situation, I look here at ways in which the canon may ascribe moral worth to plant life.

In so doing, I look at two different ways the argument may be made: direct views about moral worth and indirect views about moral worth. The tensions I describe depend primarily on the presumption that plant life has direct worth. If plants only have indirect worth, then there are many ways in which a monastic may use plants even if he may not destroy them himself. I examine why this is the case in the following section. In the course of this discussion, I argue that direct worth arguments are largely problematic, and that an indirect worth account makes more sense. This is generally because the textual evidence seems

more in favour of indirect worth arguments than direct worth arguments (even though direct worth arguments are possible).

(a) Direct Worth Arguments

The literature surrounding the moral status of plants in the Pāli canon is mainly concerned with elaborating upon direct worth arguments. Lambert Schmithausen (1991) is the most important scholar in this regard, though Alison Findly (2002) has also examined the issue in some detail.

Both authors focus on the possibility of plant sentience, and investigate whether or not the canonical literature endorses it. There are two ways that plants could be ascribed direct moral worth: (a) because they are living beings (à la the Jains), or (b) because they are sentient beings. A distinction must be drawn between being alive and being sentient. Some views run these two positions together. The Jains, for example, view all living things as being sentient. As Schmithausen suggests, the Jains believe that being alive entails sentience and vice versa (1991, p. 2; also Findly 2002, p. 253). The possibility arises, then, that plants have direct moral value simply by virtue that they are alive. Indeed, the Jains even believe that plants are part of the rebirth cycle.

(i) Plant Life and Sentience

Certainly, the early Buddhist texts also encourage the idea that plants are alive and, thus, should be distinguished from inanimate things like rocks, stones and the like. The *Sutta Nipāta*, for example, says:

I shall explain to you Vāsetṭi ha... the division of species of living creatures; manifold indeed are their species. (S, 3.9.600, p. 76)

One such division of “living beings” is “grass and trees” (ibid). In the *Vinaya*, the Buddha seems to suggest that plants are living because they are “one facultied” organisms (Vin-Pat, 11, p. 226; Vin-MV, p. 183). Findly argues that the early Buddhist texts are “indefinite at best” as to whether plants are living. In light of the previous excerpts, I tend to disagree.

In all these cases, the word used for “living” is *pāṇa* or some derivative thereof. Childers says that *pāṇa* literally means “breath” but that its more idiomatic meaning is “life, vitality, a living being” (2003, p. 331). Harvey adds that *pāṇa* should not be taken literally to

mean “breathing”, since a living creature is said to be *pāṇa* at the point of conception (when there is no actual breathing taking place) (2000, p. 308).

There is also some evidence that the life of a plant organism is found only in the seed. In the *Vinaya*, we find that monks may take and eat fruit only if five conditions are met. The fruit can be taken and eaten only if it is damaged by fire; it is damaged by a knife; it is damaged by a nail; if it is seedless; or, finally, if the seeds of the fruit have been discharged (Vin-CV, p. 195; Vin-CV, p. 147). The implication is that, if the fruit is damaged or harmed, it is dead — and thus can be eaten without moral hazard. If the fruit does not have the seed, then it is without life and lacks the capacity for propagation, and, likewise, can be eaten without any moral hazard.

These passages do imply that some harm can be done to the fruit and that this might be a direct harm to its status as a “living being.” Nonetheless, these comments are extremely isolated. The comments are made only in respect to fruit; these conditions are not made for any other kind of plant. This is possibly because other plants cannot be destroyed without moral hazard, because other plants must be uprooted, while fruit falls naturally from trees of its own accord. Schmithausen suggests that this directive was included only to please rival religious sects (probably the Jains) who do believe that fruits are alive. He suggests that the Buddhist monks described in these texts did not, in fact, believe this. It was included only as an act of tolerance towards rival customs (1991, p. 39).

Doubts, however, can be cast on whether *pāṇa* really applies to the case of plant life. Paul Waldau, contra Harvey, argues that the literal translation of *pāṇa* as “breath” actually restricts the overall meaning significantly. He writes: “Etymologically [*pāṇa*] is related to the word ‘breath’ or ‘breathing’ and since it can mean ‘breath,’ it is sometimes translated as ‘breathers.’” (2002, p. 115) He concludes that, when used in this way, *pāṇa* means “something like ‘mobile breathers’ and does not include plants.” (ibid.) His conclusion is largely based on a *Vinaya* passage that defines “living beings” as “a living thing that is an animal” (Vin-Pat, 61, p. 2).^{lxviii} Of course, these comments should be read in the context of the passage in general, which concerns the killing of crows (*kāka*), and Waldau recognises this. Hence, the definition in this passage cannot be taken as a general ruling about the meaning of *pāṇa*, but, rather, as a specific example in the context of the cited passage. But it appears, in any case, that *pāṇa* sometimes covers plants and animals, sometimes refers only to animals, and that how it should be applied is dependent on context.

Harvey observes, furthermore, that, according to the *Abhidhamma* texts, “life” is often connected with motion and movement. In quoting the *Abhidhamma*, Harvey writes:

That which, of these material states, is life (*āyu*), persistence, continuance, lastingness, movement, upkeep, keeping going, vitality, vitality-faculty. (2000, p. 308)

Under this *Abhidhamma* reading, one might conclude that plants do not have life, since living things are in motion. This distinction between mobile and immobile creatures is also made in the *Itivuttaka* (trs. *As It Was Said*). There, the Buddha announces that he does no harm to anything, and so, “By this way of living we do no harm to anything, be it movable or fixed.” (Iti, 2.1,p. 138)

The conclusions we can draw from this discussion are as follows. First, plants are generally viewed as being alive (though there are some passages in the canon that complicate this conclusion). Second, the fact that a plant is alive has some bearing on how it should be treated. Yet there is no evidence in the Buddhist texts that Buddhists should avoid harming plants merely because they are alive. This is in opposition to the Jains, who are very explicit that we should not harm plants, just as we should avoid harming any living being. Nonetheless, even though the texts do seem to suggest that plants are alive, their status as sentient beings is more in question and opens a door to the possibility of moral relevancy.

If a direct worth argument is to be floated in favour of plants, then it is more likely to come from an argument that depends on the sentience of plants. In early Buddhism, it is suffering (*dukkha*) and the absence of suffering (*adukkha*) that are the salient factors in weighing up moral considerations. The fact that a being is alive is not important. This is evident from the considerable focus that the early Buddhist texts place on suffering. What this tells us is that there is a distinction between being alive and being sentient in the early Buddhist canon. And, although these two qualities often intersect, it is not necessary that they do so.

(ii) Plant Motility and Sentience

Whether a plant is “stationary” or “immoveable” seems to have some bearing on whether a plant is sentient. Generally, the immoveable nature of plants is opposed to animals that are characterised as mobile. Schmithausen and Findly both consider the fact that plants are categorised as immobile at some length in their respective works (Schmithausen 1991, pp. 60-64; Findly 2002, pp. 258-261). Even though plants are immovable, this does not mean that they are also insentient, however.

Findly suggests that the Jains may have had some influence over the Buddhist view on plants, and that this is indicated by the fact that the Buddhists categorise plants as living,

albeit immobile, beings (2002, p. 255). Findly further argues that plants might be subject to karma. She says: "While early Buddhists do not admit to *kammic* endowment in plants, they do observe two things in particular that are kamma-like." (2002, p. 258) These two things are: (i) they grow, develop and change — this is karma-like in that karma notably fuels change in Buddhist metaphysics. (ii) The texts regularly note the continuity of plant behaviour: a seed that originates from one plant invariably reproduces a similar plant elsewhere. This is quite similar to karma, where a given action begets the same action in the future. Findly therefore concludes that plants might be subject to karma. If this is the case, then plants might be included within the schema of morally relevant beings, since only morally relevant beings are contained within the cycles of rebirth.

The problem with this argument is that Findly has only shown that plants behave in ways that are "kamma-like." In the first case, growth and change does not necessarily require karma. A rock may roll down the side of a cliff quite by accident; this, obviously, may have nothing to do with karma. The Buddhists do distinguish between ordinary causes (*hetu*) and karmic causes. It cannot be inferred that plants are subject to karma merely because they change. In the second case, the texts use plants merely as metaphors to explain actual cases of karma. This cannot be taken as evidence that plants are subject to karma. It seems to me, therefore, that we cannot conclude that plants are subject to karma on the basis of the arguments Findly develops here.

Note, however, that, in support of Findly's argument, a peculiar passage in the *Atthasālanī* states: "In dependence on the difference in kamma appears the difference in the destiny of beings without legs, with two legs, four legs, many legs, *vegetative (ajjhattikam)*, spiritual, with perception, without perception, with neither perception nor without perception." (Atth, p. 87) This passage is radical in that it seems to explicitly suggest that people can be reborn as plants. Two caveats: First, this text is a commentary only (albeit by Buddhaghosa, who is authoritative). Second, I do not know of any other passage in the Buddhist canon that indicates that people can be reborn as plants. This suggests that this particular interpretation is an outlier.

Schmithausen also investigates the possibility that plants are sentient in spite of their immovability. Schmithausen notes that a commentator, Prajñavarman, regards only mobile beings as sentient beings, and since plants are categorically regarded as immobile, they cannot be sentient (1991, p. 60). Schmithausen also notes that the Pāli texts encourage the idea that only animate beings are subject to desire while inanimate — immobile — beings are not subject to desire. Hence, the latter would not be included within the realm of rebirth (just as Arahants are not reborn) (1991, p. 61). This latter distinction is between *tasa* (mobile) and *thāvara* (immobile) beings. These two comments suggest that immobility shows that plants are not sentient.

Nonetheless, Schmithausen later concludes that these distinctions indicate, as Findly herself suggests, that Jain sources may have influenced the Buddhist idea of plant life, since the mobile/immobile distinction seems to fit better with their account (2002, p. 77).^{lxix} What appears to be the case, at any rate, is that plant immobility seems to count against, rather than for, sentience. So, this might indicate that plants are not sentient.

(iii) Plant Consciousness and Sentience

Both Schmithausen and Findly point out that plants appear to be described as being alive and having “one sense faculty” (*ekindriya jīva*). This suggests that the textual view is that plants are alive and are, to some extent, sentient as well (unlike, say, amoebas, which are merely alive). This possibility is a much more promising way of establishing plant sentience, even though that sentience may be very minimal (something that both Schmithausen and Findly acknowledge; see, for example, Schmithausen 1991, p. 69; Findly 2002, p. 252).

Schmithausen writes that, in the *Vinaya*, the act of felling a tree “was disapproved [of] by people as an act of injuring because they regard trees as living beings (*jīvasaññino...rukkhasmīṇ*), more precisely because as living beings with one sense-faculty (*ekindriya jīva*).” (1991, p. 14) Schmithausen adds that this motivation is found explicitly in the *Vinaya* of the Theravāda sect and in the *Vinaya* of the Mahāśāṅghikas (1991, p. 15). It should be noted that, as with plant motility, a pan-Indian precedent exists for plants having sense faculties. The Jain texts, for example, acknowledge that plants have a faculty of touch (Findly 2002, p. 255). The question of what this single-sense faculty signifies in the Buddhist case, however, remains somewhat unclear and must be inferred.

Findly argues that it is the sense faculty of touch (*kāya*): “[the canon designates] plants as *ekindriya* or one-facultied beings, and the clarification [is] that the one-sense faculty they have is that of touch (*kāya*).” (2002, p. 254) Findly does not offer any direct evidence that touch is the “one faculty” that plants are supposed to have. Rather, she infers this conclusion. She notes:

One way to argue that, for early Buddhists, plants are one-facultied beings is to develop the notion in the early canon [that] plants appear to be endowed with the sense of ‘touch’. (2002, p. 255)

She points out that we have direct evidence that both the Jains and the Indian religious orthodoxy of the day agreed that plants had a single faculty and that this faculty was touch (ibid). Given this, and given that the Buddhist texts also accept that plants have one faculty, it

seems reasonable to infer that the Buddhists also shared the same idea of what that faculty was (the idea might have seemed so obvious at the time that there was no need for the Buddhist texts to actually specify that the faculty was touch).

Findly also states that there is evidence for plants feeling pain in the canon. She writes that this feeling of pain in plants “certainly appears to be suggested in the important *Vinaya* passage (1.189) where renunciants are prohibited from cutting young Palmyra palms to wear as shoes because they will be harming one-facultied living beings. The horrific evidence for this prohibition is that when cut the young Palmyra palms wither up — suggesting that they are feeling pain and are expressing their response to it to ‘the outside world’.” (2002, p. 256)

I don’t believe that the observation of plants “withering up” at all implies feelings of pain. It merely shows that, under certain conditions, plants die. The phrase “to wither up” is merely a piece of expressive writing and should not be taken as a piece of direct evidence for plant sentience. An open question remains as to why the withering up of plants is bad for the Buddhist. It might be because it represents a stress for the plant, or it might be bad for more pragmatic reasons. One passage in the *Sutta Nipāta* could be taken to imply the recognition of sentience in plants. In discussing how the “life of mortals... is difficult and brief”, the *Sutta Nipāta* draws the following analogy: “Just as for ripe fruit there is constantly fear of falling, so for mortals who are born there is constantly fear of death.” (3.8.576, p. 73) This analogy implies that fruit have some degree of awareness, perhaps sentience. Of course, I must emphasise that this is just an analogy, and that we cannot draw any substantive conclusions from it. The *Milindapañha* explicitly insists that trees are not sentient. In the text, Milinda grapples with a problem arising from a *Jātaka*, a tale where it is said that trees cannot speak. Yet Milinda challenges this by claiming that some trees do speak:

‘Now if, Nāgasena, a tree is an unconscious thing it must be false that the Aspen tree spoke to Bhāradvāja. But if that is true, it must be false to say that a tree is unconscious. This too is a double-edged problem now put to you [Nagāsena], and you have to solve it.’ (Mil. 4.2.19, p. 241)

Nāgasena replies that there is no contradiction — trees are unconscious and insentient. It was, rather, the *devatā* inside that conversed with Bhāradvāja (Mil. 4.3.20, pp. 241-242). This seems to strongly suggest that the authors of the *Milindapañha* considered plants to be insentient beings.

Putting aside the case of the *Milindapañha*, it seems to me that Findly and Schmithausen’s argument for plants being minimally sentient is plausible. The texts are quite clear that plants have a single-sense faculty (probably one of touch), and, since the having of a sense faculty is intimately tied to the awareness (to be able to sense a thing is exactly to be aware of that thing), it makes sense that plants are sentient to at least some extent. The

Buddhist texts make the connection between sense faculty and awareness explicit insofar as, according to their cognitive schema, sensation is dependent on consciousness. Therefore, plants are marginally sentient and, consequently, marginally morally relevant.

(B) Indirect Worth Arguments

The previous arguments aim to explain the apparent reticence to harm plants by way of direct worth arguments. They suggest that plants could be construed as having direct moral worth if they are either understood as living, or as sentient. I argue that, while plants may be considered marginally sentient, they are sentient because they have awareness and feeling, not merely because they are alive (which, for the Buddhist texts, is beside the point).

The importance of taking care of plants is bolstered by also considering arguments for their indirect care. It also appears that there is, unlike the problematic case of direct worth, a wealth of explicit textual evidence in support of this particular view. I address these considerations in the coming section. At least three indirect harms are associated with injuring plants: (1) it injures or harms sentient beings indirectly (because it injures tree-dwellers, it is unhygienic, etc.); (2) it indirectly harms the *sarīgha* by interfering with lay livelihood; and (3) it is harmful to *dhammic* practice — such as destroying forested areas where meditation can take place — and finally, because destructive impulses are motivated by hatred, which is considered entirely un-Buddhist.

(i) Indirect Harm of Other Beings

We have already reviewed several cases where the harming of plants is rejected because it leads to the indirect harm of some other, morally relevant, being. One of the clearer cases here is the case of the tree-dwelling *devatā* whose son is injured when monks cut down his home (Vin-Pat, 11, p. 226). Again, in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, as a punishment for damaging his arboreal abode, a *deva* prevents the tree from bearing any more fruit (AN, 6.5.12, p. 262). It certainly appears, in these cases, that the harm in cutting or damaging the trees is an indirect one. According to both stories, harm arises because it both upsets the home of the *devatā* and thus causes him suffering, or, in the former case, because it causes suffering to the son of the *devatā*, whose arm was cut. Similarly, the *Kulavāka Jātaka* I just mentioned indicates that an indirect harm is done to the Garuḷ as when Sakka inadvertently levels the forest that serves as their home (Jat, 31, p. 81). In all of these cases, it is ultimately not the tree that is wronged.^{lxx}

Harvey makes note of the story (2000, p. 175), but also suggests that “the relationship of a tree-deity to ‘his’ or ‘her’ tree is generally seen as a close one. In some texts, while a deity may be harmed in the process of felling his or her tree, he or she may move on

to another one.” (2000, p. 176)^{lxxi} There is no necessary connection, then, between harming a tree and harming its inhabitants. Schmithausen notes that the *Vinaya* story about the *devatā* and his son is both (a) subject to much variation in different editions, and (b) is absent in the *Vinaya* of the Mahāsāṅghikas “and at least one of the Sthavira branches” (1991, pp. 13-14). From this, Schmithausen concludes that “the Pāli version [is] easily recognizable as intercalated.” (1991, p. 14) Be this as it may, other examples exist regarding how harming plants only indirectly harms (relevant) sentient beings.

We learn from the *Vinaya*, for example, that the reason that harming plants is wrong is because it brings the *sarīgha* into disrepute — because people start to gossip. We know this because of the stock refrain: “People looked down upon, criticised, spread it about, saying: ‘How can these recluses... cut down trees and have them cut down?’” (Vin-Pat, 11, p. 226) A clearer example is in the *Vinaya Mahāvagga*. There, a group of monks are cutting down palms to make shoes from the fronds. The Buddha chastises these monks in part because “... people think that there are living things in a tree.” (Vin-MV, 5, p. 252) Schmithausen elaborates by saying that these considerations imply that “the monks themselves do not share the belief that in plants being living, sentient beings,” but that they nonetheless obey the public (albeit, superstitious and non-Buddhist) desires so that they can avoid offence (1991, p. 16). It’s just good public relations.

Throwing food scraps onto grass and into water also constitutes another indirect harm. The Buddha, in several places, asks that monks not dispose of food scraps on grass or in water where animals live. In the *Vinaya*, the Buddha says that, when disposing of food scraps, “he may throw them away where there is but little green grass or he may drop them into water where there are no living creatures.” (Vin-MV, 4, p. 208) This extends to using water that has living creatures in it: “Whatever monk should knowingly make use of water that contains living things, there is an offence of expiation.” (Vin-Pat, 62, p. 3)^{lxxii}

In reading these passages, one is inclined, first of all, to conclude that these directives are concerned with avoiding the animals (such as insects) that live inside or around the grass and water. Hence, discarding food on grass and water does not so much harm the grass (or water), but, moreover, the “living creatures” that live there. The *Kulavāka Jātaka* is reasonably clear that throwing refuse into water and grass is bad because it harms beings therein, rather than the water or grass itself. In that *Jātaka*, the Buddha admonishes a young monk for not using a water strainer, saying: “Can you, who have devoted yourself to so saving a creed, drink unstrained water with all the living creatures therein?” (Jat, 31, p. 83) (The Buddha here, of course, means that as a monk he should not drink unstrained water because it might harm animals living there.)

In fact, Schmithausen implies that these passages also suggest something else: a concern for hygiene. He notes that, in other passages, the Buddha makes a similar claim that excrement should not be disposed of in water and grass. Schmithausen suggests that this is

more a matter of keeping good hygiene than worrying about what might happen to the grass or insects (however, that could also naturally be a factor) (1991, pp. 31-35). This directive concerning the disposal of excrement can be linked to the directive concerning the disposal of food scraps. The Buddha could be pointing to the fact that dumping food outside is an unhygienic practice (it attracts vermin and other disease carriers, for example). Poor hygiene is a direct harm to human and animal health. Thus, harming plants by dumping food scraps indirectly leads to harm to humans and other animals.

(ii) Indirect Harm to Lay Business Interests

In this vein, it might be posited that the concern regarding harming plants and trees is related to the recent development of agriculture. Gombrich spells out how wealthy businessmen were the main sponsors of early Buddhism, and that this wealth was largely a product of the rise of agriculture (1988, p. 57). Kalupahana obliquely indicates the importance of agriculture in Buddhism (1995, p. 113), and I. B. Horner regards it as critical, stating:

Crops were regarded as supremely valuable by the lay contemporaries of the early Buddhist monks, and agriculture was ranked in the *Vinaya* [...] as one of the three 'high works' or activities. (1967, p. 9)

Similarly, Bailey & Mabbett say that, during the time of the Buddha:

agriculture and trade networks were developing. This environment must have been relevant to the appeal of Buddhism, and of other new non-brāhmaṇical teachings. (2003, p. 13)

Bailey & Mabbett both agree with Gombrich that the Buddha's teaching was appealing partly because it thrived within a new urbanised environment. Buddhism, in other words, was an urban religion.

If the Buddha depended extensively on wealthy agriculturalists for the *saṅgha*'s continued survival, then it would have been in his best interests to protect plants up to a point, but, at the same time, allow plants to be harvested and their products to be consumed and used. The *Jātaka* story that I mention earlier (about the deer that destroy the human crops) reinforces this idea (Jat, 12, p. 41). The deer refrain from eating the crops because they want

to avoid interfering with human agriculture, because this would constitute a great harm to the humans.^{lxxiii} Similarly, food and excrement are not to be disposed of on “crops”. One explanation for this is that doing so will damage the farmer’s agricultural development (Vin-Pat, 9, p. 259). The Pāli texts regularly make use of agricultural similes. The use of such similes could be indicative of the nature and identity of the lay audience, and what sorts of similes and parables would arouse their interest and understanding.^{lxxiv}

This concern over supporting local agriculture business could explain why the Buddha, on the one hand, insisted that plants and trees are not to be wilfully destroyed, while, on the other hand, allowing his monks to accept and use plant products. Treading this careful path protected the interests of his lay associates both in terms of protecting their investments and in ensuring that their market was maintained. Clearly, harming these plants would have produced a considerable indirect harm to the laity, while banning the use of plants would have presented a similarly devastating effect. The fact that the Buddha was concerned with what effect his rulings would have on the laity is evident throughout the *Vinaya*, since he is constantly concerned with the opinion of the “hoi polloi”. Schmithausen believes that the later diminishing interest in the idea that plants are sentient may have been a product of the further development of agriculture. He writes:

It may be worth investigating whether such a fading belief in the sentience of plants, earth and water may have originated in connection with the extension of agriculture, or with the emergence or full-fledged development of urbanization, or with any other change of the period. (1991, p. 78)

In this regard, the Buddha’s concern over preserving agriculture and allowing plants to be harvested (and protected) would only have increased as the *saṅgha* became increasingly settled and urbanised.

(iii) Indirect Harm to Dhammic Practices

Destroying plants can also harm *dhammic* practice. As we saw in section one, forest recluship is extremely important in early Buddhist texts. The importance of forest recluship may have diminished as time went on, but there is still strong textual support for forest renunciation. As we also saw earlier, the forest is of practical importance insofar as it is a quiet space in which contemplation can take place. It is also a symbol of independence and solitude — qualities that represent the monastic ideal. Harming the forest, then, results in certain indirect harms to the *saṅgha*. Not only does the destruction of the forest rob the

sarīgha of a place to practise their meditation in isolation, but it also does damage to the symbols of monastic life. It is not for no reason, then, that the Buddha is so quick to protect forests and plants: both prudential and sentimental value exists in ensuring that the forest is prosperous and thriving. Evidently, however, this does not say anything about the intrinsic value of the forest.

Similarly, we learn throughout the canonical literature that qualities such as anger (*kodha*), hatred (*dosa*) and greed (*lobha*) are unsavoury and harmful character traits.^{lxxv} The wilful destruction of plants and forests would, the Buddhist may argue, be conditioned by any or all of these qualities. In fact, many of the objections raised by the Buddha against certain monastic activities echoes these concerns. When the monks are told not to keep shoes and other possessions ornamented with plant matter (Vin-MV, p. 243) it is because ornamentation is a sign of greed and desire. What drives the impulse to destroy or harm plants, or to use them in inappropriate ways, may represent un-Buddhist character traits.

V - Conclusion: Plants Are Morally Relevant

There is no question that the Buddha is reticent about harming plants. The question is “Why?” In the previous sections, I have looked at various arguments for the indirect worth of plants for the Buddha. Although some evidence implies that plants have direct worth, the evidence that they have indirect worth is much more compelling. If plants do possess direct worth, the texts are quite circumspect about the relevance of this fact, and tend to ignore it overall. It is possible, as we see in the next chapter, that an overly inflexible view about plants may have led to certain inter-religious strife with, for example, the Jains. In this respect, it would have been practical to pay little heed to arguments for direct worth.

Indirect worth arguments also have the advantage of ensuring that monastics may use plant matter in spite of the fact that plants may not, in general, be destroyed. The fact that plants may be regarded as marginally sentient halts the full realisation of some of these advantages. But several things can be said here: (i) Although plants may be sentient, they are only marginally sentient, and, commensurate with that, are not as morally relevant as other more cognitively enabled beings, such as animals and humans. (ii) Even if plant sentience represents a problem for the Buddhists, it presents an even larger problem for the Jains, who certainly view plants as fully sentient beings. (iii) It is possible that the Buddhists consider plants minimally sentient only out of caution.

In any case, I demonstrate that the situation with animals differs markedly from the situation with plants. There is no confusion about the moral relevancy of animals. I argue that monks should not make use of animal products because it leads to a direct harm to animals. Note that this finding also means that monks can actually eat some kind of food without moral hazard, unlike the Jains, who are in a very difficult ethical position given their moral presuppositions about the sentient nature of plants.

^{xlii} We learn in the *Mahāpadāna Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* that previous Buddhas in past lives were also born under a whole range of different types of trees: “The Lord Buddha Vipassī gained his full enlightenment at the foot of a trumpet-flower tree; the Lord Buddha Sikhī under a white mango tree; the Lord Buddha Vessubhū under a *sāl* tree; the Lord Buddha Kakusandha under an acacia tree; the Lord Buddha Konāgamana under a fig tree; the Lord Buddha Kassapa under a *banyan* tree; and I became fully enlightened at the foot of an *assattha* tree (i.e. a *Bodhi* Tree).” (DN 14.1.8, p. 200)

^{xliii} On the same page, Buddhaghosa notes: “The miracle performed at the throne of the Wisdom Tree (Bodhi Tree) and performed at the assembly of his relatives and that performed at the assembly of citizens of Pāṭ aliputta were all the same as the Twin Miracle performed at the foot of the white mango tree in the garden of Kaṇḍ a.” (Atth, p. 16)

^{xliiv} Woodward explains that the “mucalinda tree” is some “sort of asoka tree” (U, p. 12, n. 5). It appears that the Udanā has so named the tree as an homage to the Nāga king.

^{xliv} The Buddha composed the *Abhidhamma* in the Tavatimsa heaven so that a new dispensation by the gods could be created at a later time to humanity. For a full list of the different celestial trees in the heavens, see Buddhaghosa (Atth, p. 393).

^{xlvi} Even though the forest is recommended in this passage, visiting the village is also regarded as a necessity (710-711, p. 88). This has always been a great tension in Buddhist literature: the attraction of the forest hermitage versus the necessity of entering the urban environment in order to spread the *dhamma*.

^{xlvii} In the Sammodamāna *Jātaka*, he is the king of the quails and lives in a forest (Jat, 33, p. 85), and in the Naḷ apāna *Jātaka*, he is the king of the monkeys and he lives in a forest, too (Jat, 20, p. 54). In a related story, the *bodhisatta* is king of the dogs and lives in a cemetery (Jat, 22, p. 58), which is relevant because, as we have learnt, a cemetery is considered another “solitary place” suitable for meditation.

^{xlviii} Perhaps counter to this idea, the Vinaya bans lax monks from participating in forest renunciation (and this is perhaps because they cannot be trusted to be alone with themselves lest they fall into vice).

^{xlix} The importance of forest recluseship is also noted by Alison Findly, who writes: “The tradition of renunciants as tree-root-dwellers is common among many groups of religious wanderers at the time of early Buddhism, but what is originally a habitual convention becomes in the Pāli canon a *dhammic* prescription.” (2002, p. 262)

ⁱ This point is repeated at p. 196.

ⁱⁱ In support of this idea, Peter Harvey writes: “From the beginning of Buddhism, the forest has represented the ideal place for meditation for monks, as seen in the refrain, ‘These are the roots of trees, these are empty places. Meditate, monks...’” (2000, p. 174)

ⁱⁱⁱ The problem of poisonous trees is raised again in the Phala *Jātaka*. There, the *bodhisatta* is born as a gardener who warns (as the Monkey King does, too, verbatim) his underlings to “take heed that you taste no unfamiliar leaf, flower, or fruit without first consulting me.” (Jat, 54, p. 135)

^{liii} Chalmers translates *rakkhaso* as “ogre”, but I am not sure that this is entirely appropriate. According to Childers, a *rakkhasa* was a type of “demon” or “ogre” who had cannibalistic tendencies (2003, p. 400).

^{liv} The original *Bodhi* Tree was ultimately destroyed. The *Mahāvamsa* tells this story: “The Great *Bodhi* Tree was planted in the Mahameghavana Park in the eighteenth year of Aśoka the Righteous. In her third year [Queen Asandhamitta], who was foolish and vain on account of her beauty, thought, ‘The king is devoted to the great *Bodhi* Tree rather than me.’ Succumbing to hatred, she had the great *Bodhi* Tree destroyed by a *maṇḍu* thorn.” (MV, 20, p. 209) The translators point out that the tree was only made ill by the Queen’s assassination attempt. It was not until the 17th century that the great *Bodhi* Tree was destroyed. Note that Childers says only that a *maṇḍuka* is “a *maṇḍu* thorn, supposed to destroy a tree or plant pierced with it.” (2003, p. 236)

^{lv} Bhikkhu Bodhi’s translation has the sentence read: “seven fruits *and* benefits”. But, since the term “benefits” does not appear in the original Pāli, I have removed this term from the above quotation since it prejudices the case.

^{lvi} In his comprehensive study of plants in the Pāli literature, Schmithausen notes that *bhūtagāma* literally means “mass of plants”, and is constructed in opposition to seeds and roots (1991, p. 6).

^{lvii} Also see Vin-BV, 3, p. 175.

^{lviii} The PTS version has ‘*jīvaśāro*’ mean ‘consciousness as living beings’ but maybe just ‘living consciousness’ is more appropriate. I have changed this accordingly.

^{lix} These textual observations are all made by other authors, too (Harvey 2002, p. 174; Schmithausen 1991, p. 8; Findly 2002, p. 252).

^{lx} Schmithausen makes a similar point (1991, p. 26). He notes that this is partly because it is foreseeable that animals would be killed if monks were to wander about. Hence, it could not be viewed as an accident.

^{lxi} It is not uncommon for *devatā* and *picāsa* (sprites) to live in trees. See also the *Dummedha Jātaka* (Jat, 50, p. 127). One *Jātaka* even tells of how one conman pretended to be a tree spirit in order to make a financial gain. He hid in a hollow tree and pretended to be the guardian spirit therein, and issued instructions to devotees that advantaged him financially. The *bodhisatta* discovered that it was a trick when he set the tree alight: “The [conman] was half roasted by the rising flames and clambered up by clutching hold of a bough.” (Jat, 98, pp. 239-240)

^{lxii} Otherwise known as the “Garudas” — mystic birds at war with the Nāgas (Childers 2003, p.1 44).

^{lxiii} In the *Matakabhatta Jātaka*, it is explained that the Buddha, as a *bodhisatta*, once was a *devatā* who himself lived in a tree (Jat, 18, p. 53). A similar story is told in the *Baka Jātaka*. There, it is said that the *bodhisatta* was born as a tree sprite (*rukkha-picāsa*) who inhabited a tree in a forest (Jat, 38, p. 96).

^{lxiv} The story motivates a rather charming *Jātaka* tale about a tribe of monkeys who are recruited by a king to watch and care for his garden while he is absent. The king of the monkeys instructs his underlings to “pull each young tree up and look at the size of the roots.” The trees are to be watered according to the size of the roots. This ignorance, of course, kills all of the trees and plants.

^{lxv} Childers simply says that “a sort of grass, *Saccharum Muñja*, from the fibre of which brahmanical string is made.” (2003, p. 252)

^{lxvi} Childers states that the noun *tiṇa* just means “grass, herb, weed” (2003, p. 506). In short, “*tiṇa* a grass” is just ordinary grass, not a special type. This interpretation is perhaps confirmed by the Sinhala, whereby *tiṇa kola* simply means “ordinary grass” (*tiṇa* means “grass”; *kola* means “leaf”).

^{lxvii} Childers says that *kamala* means “lotus” (2003, p. 177). Horner, in her translation notes, argues that “*kamala* grass” does not mean “lotus grass” (Vin-MV, p. 252, n. 4). He says that the Vinaya commentary observes that the grass in question was merely “lotus coloured” (*kamalavaṇṇa*).

^{lxviii} Buddhaghosa agrees that “life” and “breathing” are co-related: “Life taking means taking life quickly or by violence. Slaughtering or killing is meant. ‘Life’ here (literally breathing things), in common parlance, means a being; in its ultimate sense, living force (*jīvitindriya*).” (Atth, pp. 128-129)

^{lxix} For example, the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* states: “If a well-controlled man, afraid of injuring any movable or immovable living beings, above, below, or on earth, condemns evil deeds, he does not at all blame (anybody) in the world.” (Jacobi 1964, p. 412; also, p. 415) It is clear from this passage that the Jain source acknowledges that immobile and mobile beings are morally relevant.

^{lxx} Schmithausen and Harvey both comment and draw attention to the case of the arboreal *devatā* and his son.

^{lxxi} In the Vinaya, we discover that monks may not live in “hollow trees” because trees are known to be the homes of gods and demons, and if a monk were to live there he might be taken to be a demon worshipper (Vin-MV, 3, p. 201).

^{lxxii} Also see Vin-Pat, 9, p. 259.

^{lxxiii} Some *Jātakas* also somberly discuss the problems caused by droughts. This is partly because droughts lead to “crops withering” (Jat, 75, p. 184). It is not irrelevant that it is the Buddha that causes rain to fall (thus saving the farmers’ crops and averting economic catastrophe).

^{lxxiv} Consider, for example, the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, which describes how the cultivation of the mind is like the cultivation of the ground by a farmer. All the preparations must be done at the right time, in the right season (AN 3.9.82, p. 209). Buddhaghosa uses the simile about a man who is enthusiastic in tilling his field (Atth, p. 148).

^{lxxv} For example, in the *Samyutta Nikāya* the Buddha asks that anger be “slain” and that this is something that “the noble ones praise.” (SN, 1.71. p. 133) Elsewhere, it is noted that “greed,

hatred, and delusion” are the root of suffering and consequently something to eliminate. (SN, 3.23, p. 189).

Chapter 3

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The Question of Vegetarianism and Diet in Pāli Buddhism

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Part Two: Ethnographic Study

Animal Ethics and Vegetarianism in Sinhala Buddhism

CHAPTER 4 | NON-VIOLENCE TOWARDS ANIMALS IN SINHALA MYTH AND HISTORY

In this chapter, I consider the development of animal welfare in Sinhala myth and history. This study refers to both ancient and modern sources. The importance of this is obvious: the historical circumstances by which Sinhala Buddhism encounters animal welfare influences the manner in which the ethnographic data should be interpreted in the coming chapters.

In the course of this chapter, I demonstrate that, overall, Sinhala culture seems to be deeply invested in animal welfarism and vegetarianism as a dietary ideal. We find, however, that there are multiple explanations for these pro-attitudes towards animals in Sinhala culture. One of the motivations for animal welfarism is a desire among some Sinhala Buddhists to be ethically scrupulous, and this ethical outlook is basically religious in character. Other motivations are fundamentally political in character — for example, we see that the history of the animal welfare movement in Sri Lanka is often a consequence of conflict with rival religious or ethnic groups. Historically, the rival has been the Catholics, and then later, British missionary groups. In more modern times, these rival factions have been represented by the Tamils. Another explanation is, of course, religious: many Sinhala Buddhists aim to be devout, and some of them believe that this is achieved not only through avoiding violence, but also by avoiding meat foods.

Another emerging theme is the existence of a tension between the acknowledgement of the animal welfare ideal in Sinhala myth and history, which is at odds with activities opposed to animal welfare that have flourished. For example, the *Mahāvamsa* encourages anti-hunting practices and also depicts King Duṭṭha ġāmaṇī as regretting the slaughter of the Tamils and King Eḷāra. Yet, at the same time, hunting was still practised in Sri Lanka (as we find Robert Knox acknowledging during his time in the Kandyan interior of the island), and Duṭṭha ġāmaṇī was ultimately persuaded that the slaughter of the Tamils was entirely justifiable. This tension can be applied easily to the case of food and diet: Gombrich, Obeyesekere and others all report that Sinhala Buddhists often idealise vegetarianism and yet nominally consume meat.

The twin images of the lion and the cow serve as a symbol of these two ideals. On the one hand, Sinhala Buddhists typically internalise the myth of the lion and the lion's perceived traits, such as its ferocity, bravery and martial skill. Yet Sinhala Buddhists also venerate and respect the cow, and, consequently, its slaughter is completely disallowed in Sri Lanka. In this latter respect, Sinhala Buddhists internalise the ideal of non-violence and the virtue of animal welfarism. The aim of this chapter is, in part, to expose more fully this tension and to consider it in detail.

To gain a full understanding of the rich context in which Sinhala Buddhist history is located, it is necessary to first of all consider animal welfare in the ancient Indian sources. Naturally, given that the subject of this thesis is concerned with Theravāda Buddhism and, more specifically, its lived experience in Sinhala Buddhism, it is not possible to discuss the Indian case in great detail. Rather, I draw attention only to a few important strands of Indian religious thought that apply to this particular issue of animal nonviolence and vegetarianism.

I. Animal Protectionism in India

India tends to entertain a good reputation when it comes to animal welfarism and animal protectionism. This is probably owed to at least three factors: First, the well-known fact that King Aśoka endorsed the protection of animals in his edicts; second, the idea of the Indian holy cow, which operates as a space in which animal welfare can flourish; and third, the existence of a powerful vegetarian ethos within pan-Indian culture represented, predominately, by Brahmans and Jains. I investigate, albeit briefly, each of these facets of Indian animal welfarism. In the course of this investigation, I problematise the degree to which these conceptual schemas can properly be regarded as pro-animal or even pro-animal welfare.

The importance of investigating the Indian animal welfare ethos is obvious in respect to Sri Lanka because, as Gombrich repeatedly observes in his own research, non-Buddhist India maintains a strong cultural influence over Sinhala Buddhist communities. Gombrich's principal example of this is the manner in which the Kataragama *dewalaya* in Kataragama increasingly ceased being an exclusively Hindu-Tamil enclave and slowly became a religious space dominated by Sinhala-Buddhist Kataragama devotees (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988). These Sinhala Buddhists, in fact, began to adopt Hindu practices — such as fire walking, possession, etc. — from their Hindu-Tamil counterparts.

Importantly, these Sinhala Buddhists still maintained their Buddhist identities, but simply adopted Hindu practices. The influence of Hindu-India on these Sinhala Buddhists is, therefore, obvious, and it should be expected that this influence may arise in other areas, such as animal welfare. Given the apparent importance of vegetarianism and animal welfare in India, it is therefore prudent to consider possible Indian influences in Sinhala communities. In the course of this and subsequent investigations, I note a number of interesting similarities and dissimilarities with the case of India.

(a) The Aśoka Rock Edicts

One common way in which Indian culture is seen as animal friendly is through King Aśoka (304-323 B.C.). Since Aśoka was himself a late convert to Buddhism, and since the rock

edicts are thought to have been erected after his conversion, his apparent attitude of non-violence towards animals is sometimes attributed to his newfound Buddhism. However, this claim can be disputed.

One of the subjects of the rock edicts famously concerns the preservation of animal life. We find that the rock edicts condemn the slaughter of animals and indirectly encourage vegetarianism. That this is supposedly a result of his Buddhism is typified in remarks from I. B. Horner, who says:

Aśoka, who became exceedingly sensitive to the taking of animal life, abolished [...] communal feeding [on animal flesh], first of all by reducing the number of animals slain daily to three, and for use only at the royal table itself, and then decreed on the rock that 'even these three living creatures shall not be slain in the future.' (1967, p. 3)

Vegetarianism was, therefore, ostensibly mandatory in the Mauryan Kingdom, except for royalty, who were themselves allowed to eat a stipend of animal flesh. This restricted policy on animal slaughter is noteworthy because it shows limits to compassion and that those limits are usually set by the boundaries of one's appetite.^{civ}

Whether this ideal was followed at all, and whether dissent earned punishment, remains unclear (in reality, the edict was probably interpreted as a recommendation more so than as a requirement). What we do know is that Aśoka's rule is widely considered the de facto ideal for any Buddhist ruler among Theravāda communities. Furthermore, it is almost certain that these edicts have some influence over historical and cultural norms regarding animal non-violence both in India and in Sri Lanka, and that they almost certainly have particular influence over Buddhist communities.^{cv}

But, in fact, the notion that Aśoka was indebted to Buddhism for his pious attitude towards animals has been called into doubt. Horner's comments are symptomatic of this view, but Alsdorf challenges it with some compelling evidence, indicating that Aśoka's pro-attitude towards animals may have had nothing to do with Buddhism. Alsdorf argues that non-violence towards animals was a common pan-Indian concern, and was common to all of the major Indian religious movements in some form or another (Brahmanism is a complicated case — as is Buddhism). So, it is premature to assume that Buddhism is the only religion that plays a hand in his non-violent views. In defence of this general point, Alsdorf writes:

In the emperor Aśoka's edicts too, *ahiṃsā* is evidenced as non-Buddhist. Aśoka participates in a common Indian movement of thought and is a religiously tolerant monarch; his Buddhism only favours his *ahiṃsā*. (2010, p. ix)

Alsdorf claims that it is plausible that this non-violent attitude was simply a pluralistic sentiment intended to bring together all the religious movements under one banner of non-violence. Alsdorf even observes that a number of Aśokan rock edicts contain inscriptions concerning animal non-killing that have been directly lifted from Brahmanical textual sources, not Buddhist ones (2010, p. 54). Further to this, it appears that Aśoka did not even specifically mention anything notably Buddhist in any of his public edicts.^{cv} For these reasons, Alsdorf believes that Aśoka's concern for animals should not be attributed to his Buddhism, but is just part of the Indian zeitgeist of the time.

Of course, it may further be the case that Aśoka's animal welfare attitude itself is only superficial (even ignoring the problems associated with the origin of his beliefs). First, we find that Aśoka allows animals to be slaughtered for royalty. This already casts into doubt his commitment to animal protectionism. Second — as Alsdorf suggests — Aśoka's edicts may be motivated out of religious pluralism, and might, therefore, be construed as a calculated political move rather than a genuine attempt to improve the lot of animals.

We can see, then, that the conventional view — that Aśoka was deeply invested in animal welfare — is problematic. More problematic is that his motivation may not even have been Buddhist. But what is important for our purposes is that Buddhists believe that he was a sincere protector of animals. This has no doubt influenced the climate of animal welfare in Sri Lanka. Another relevant observation here is the fact that Buddhists attribute to Aśoka an attitude of non-violence towards animals, which tells us something about how Buddhists prefer Buddhism to be seen: namely as a religion of non-violence, a religion that is kind to animals, and a religion that is not tolerant of suffering.

As this chapter unfolds, it becomes increasingly plain that this vision of Buddhism as a non-violent religion is how Sinhala Buddhism has often been depicted in Sinhala Buddhist myth and history. This image of Sinhala Buddhism as non-violent may have been influenced by animal welfarism and animal protectionism from elsewhere, namely India. To these other influences we now turn, starting with the important role of the cow in Indian culture.

(b) Cow Protection in India

It is widely accepted that India maintains a cultural norm of deep respect for the life of the cow. Stories abound of traffic grinding to a halt in busy Indian streets in order to let a cow rest on the road. Only with great hesitation is the cow shooed away if this happens at all. Another

common cultural image is that of the cow dressed in garlands with a *bindi* on its forehead. Often, these images are associated with Nandi the bull, who is the mount (*vahana*) of Śiva. Because of the sacredness attached to Nandi, it is plausible to think that the origin of this veneration arises strictly from religious sentiment. Writing in 1911, Crooke summarises this general attitude towards cows:

Though respect for the [cow] is widely spread among races in the pastoral stage of culture, it seems rarely, if ever, to reach that feeling of passionate devotion towards their sacred animals which is found amongst the Hindus. (1912, p. 277)

Crooke's observation that cows are highly regarded by many Hindu-Indians is surely true even today. Gandhi, for example, maintained that cows should be specially respected.^{cvi} Needless to say, Gandhi's views continue to have influence amongst modern political groups. Fuller confirms this in his more contemporary study of Hinduism:

Nowadays, throughout India, blood sacrifice attracts criticism and condemnation. Animals are certainly killed on a lesser scale than they used to be and the greatest victim, the buffalo, is rarely offered now. [...] Some Coorgs opposed buffalo sacrifice on the grounds that buffaloes were akin to cows. (2004, p. 99)

But this notion that Hindu-India is highly invested in cow protectionism can be problematised almost immediately. To begin with, it seems that cow protectionism is a recent phenomenon in Indian culture. Both Ludwig Alsdorf and D. N. Jha — notable scholars of Indian culture and history — argue forcefully that, historically, Vedic practices did not encourage the special treatment of cattle. Jha, who has produced the more recent and more publicised work on this topic, was subject to much harassment in India. His book was ultimately banned. Matthew Sayers argues that this owes primarily to Hindu nationalism, and that the content of Jha's book is not intrinsically objectionable (2003, pp. 311-313). He adds that Jha's claims have been accepted by scholars for some time. Nonetheless, the aggressive reaction to Jha's book demonstrates that there remains, as Crooke observed in 1911, a passionate pro-Cow movement.

The source of this outrage is, as I have mentioned, Jha's observation that the Vedas and Brahmanas — two important textual sources for modern Hinduism — both encourage the ritual slaughter of animals. In fact, contrary to the view that cows are not to be harmed, Jha observes that the Vedas regard the slaughter of cattle as the highest form of sacrifice,

because the Vedic gods view bovine flesh as the highest delicacy (2002, p. 29). Not only this, and contrary to potential assumptions about Indian vegetarianism, the sacrifice of these animals also entails their consumption (2002, p. 32; Fuller 2004, p. 74). Animal sacrifice is a way of producing favour with the gods, and this favour can only be realised through the consumption and internalisation of the blessed flesh.^{cviii}

In view of the fact that cattle were slaughtered and eaten by the ancient Indians, Jha makes the point that “the cow was neither sacred nor unslayable in the Vedic period.” (2002, p. 38)^{cix} Jha observes that, although the cow was not sacred, it was considered important from a business and agricultural perspective, given that cows were multiply useful and, therefore, treasured pieces of property (2002, p. 39). Jha intimates that these prudential virtues may have been the genesis for future moralising about the intrinsic value of cows in Indian society. This moralising may have developed in another way: despite Jha’s protests, the cow is sacred in at least one way — it is the favoured animal for sacrifice.

Alsdorf, along with Jha, also argues that key orthodox Hindu religious texts encourage animal sacrifice. He observes that the *Manu-smṛ ti*, for example, condemns animal slaughter, except in the case of animal sacrifice (2010, pp. 20-21). Nonetheless, he also notes that such interpretations are complicated by the fact that other passages encourage non-violence towards animals. One passage reads, for example: “One cannot obtain meat without injuring living beings, but the killing of living beings does not lead to heaven, therefore one must do without meat.” (2010, p. 3) In the course of his analysis, Alsdorf observes that the text contorts itself in various ways in order to justify animal sacrifice in the face of its non-violent principles.

For example, it is claimed that killing for sacrifice is not true killing (2010, pp. 20-21). Tension is evident, then, in that the *Manu-smṛ ti*, and Alsdorf’s, preferred solution is to date the portions of the text that encourage vegetarianism the older part (2010, p. 25). Given that the Vedas and Brahmanas are the oldest Hindu sources available, and given that Jha views these texts as overwhelmingly pro-animal sacrifice, it remains to be seen how this squares with Alsdorf’s claim that the *Manu-smṛ ti* was originally pro-animal welfare. However, the answer to this question is the subject of another, more focused, analysis.

The Vedas, Brahmanas and *Manu-smṛ ti* all provide evidence that animals — and, in particular, cows — were allowed to be slaughtered. It is no surprise, then, that Alsdorf also counts the *Mahābhārata* (a classic of Indian literature and a huge influence on modern Hinduism) as another text that allows animal slaughter. But, as with the *Manu-smṛ ti*, a tension and conflict exists around this question. Portions of the text advise that the killing of animals is wrong, but animal sacrifice is nonetheless considered a necessary activity (2010, pp. 32-33).

Again, this discrepancy is similarly justified through special pleading: animal killing is wrong except in the case of sacrifice whereby the animal is promised heaven — thus justifying its slaughter. Furthermore, it is argued that, without such just sacrifice, no one could ever eat meat (because killing animals is otherwise disallowed). This, the text tells us, would be inconceivable (ibid). Finally, the *Mahābhārata* extols the virtues of non-violence, but admits that, as an ideal, it is impossible because one cannot help but kill living things — it cites the example of agricultural farming cited (ibid). Alsdorf concludes that the text is largely incoherent on the question of vegetarianism and the wider issue of animal non-violence. (2010, p. 34)

As for the modern day situation, it is apparent that the slaughter of cattle and other animals still goes on within Hindu communities as part of sacrificial ritual. The Kalighat temple in Calcutta maintains two chambers for animal sacrifice — one for goats and sheep, another for other animals, such as buffalo.^{cx} According to Fuller, animal sacrifice is a common method of placating angry goddesses. (2004, p. 46) Another instance of cattle sacrifice occurs during the Dashain festival in Nepal. During this festival, hundreds of goats and buffalo are sacrificed, and their entrails are hung from temple entrances. These entrails are consequently left for many months after the festival has concluded. Nonetheless, animal sacrifice, as Fuller (2004, p. 94) observes, is often associated with lower castes. Higher castes (especially the Brahman caste) tend to view animal sacrifice as defiling. As Fuller observes, although animal sacrifice is increasingly unpopular and maligned, it is still sometimes recognised as necessary. (2004, p. 101)

I conclude, therefore, that cow sacrifice and animal slaughter were common practices historically, and, in fact, continue to exist as current practices, in spite of the fact that certain principles of non-violence seem to discourage it. We have already seen that Buddhists also maintain an interesting tension between the promotion of non-violence and the approval of meat eating. This tension between violence and non-violence is also echoed in the Hindu case that I have mentioned. In Hinduism, the image of animal protectionism is most forcefully maintained in the case of the cow. But it remains to be seen why this image has been propagated, given that the historical precedent for it remains so ambiguous.

There are at least two plausible explanations for the importance of the sacred cow in Hindu-Indian culture. The first is an argument developed by Crooke, who maintains that the sacredness of the cow is owed primarily to the importance of preserving the cow as an agricultural resource. (1912, p. 282) Another explanation is political. Freitag argues that the symbol of the sacred cow was a useful force in mobilising and uniting Indians together for particular political causes, particularly as a vehicle for protesting Muslim animal slaughter. (1980, pp. 621-622) She points out that the cow protection riots that erupted in 1893 in Northern India were motivated, ostensibly, by anti-Muslim sentiment. For Freitag, such divisions fostered the construction of a definitive Hindu identity, and part of that identity was

the notion of cow protectionism (whether this was warranted by textual sources is unimportant here). It is worth observing that Gandhi also aimed to build a Hindu national identity in order to help overthrow the British, and that this identity may have included this ideal of cow protectionism.^{cxii} Fuller says:

Contemporary opposition to animal sacrifice derives, in large measure, from modern Hindu reformism. Reformism has never been a unitary phenomenon, but it was and is a powerful current within Hinduism, and its roots mainly lie in India's encounter with the west during the colonial era. (2004, p. 99)

Cow protectionism is, therefore, associated with issues of Hindu identity. So, the veneration of cows also becomes a nationalistic issue, which likewise helps to explain some of the backlash against Jha's book that I described earlier. The role of religious identity in shaping attitudes to animal welfare becomes relevant again when considering the attitudes of some of the lay informants.

We can conclude from this analysis two things: First, the notion of the cow as an intrinsically sacred and inviolable creature in the Brahmanical and Hindu ethos is questionable, if not downright false. Second, the explanation for cow protectionism might find its roots in underlying sociological and political forces, rather than explicit religious pronouncements. The former finding reflects the Sinhala Buddhist case, because, as I demonstrate, a similar tension exists regarding the role of vegetarianism there. The latter finding is similarly important, because we can also observe that the animal protection movement in Sri Lanka is likewise motivated by political concerns. Many parallels exist between the Indian case and Sinhala case. It is likely that some "cross-pollination" has occurred at some point. But the issue of cow protectionism becomes more important in Chapter 6 when I begin to consider the *Sangviḍāṇaye Panivudāyaki* or *The Organisation for the Accumulation of Life*, an organisation that is specially concerned with cow protection.

(c) Vegetarianism as a Hindu Ideal

India is famously viewed as a haven for vegetarianism. Many Westerners are familiar with Hinduism through Gandhi — and Gandhi, of course, regarded vegetarianism as a natural expression of the Hindu ethical ideal. This view is so integrated that it is regarded as the traditional dietary requirement for many Brahmins (see Fuller 2004, p. 235).

There is some basis for this idea. As we have already seen, animal slaughter is at least sometimes condemned in Vedic and Brahman sources, and this naturally leads to and entails vegetarianism. Christopher Fuller is a valuable resource regarding the question of

vegetarianism in modern Hinduism. He points out that vegetarianism is widespread among Brahmans in the south of India and even among some non-Brahman castes (2004, p. 93). For Fuller — and others, such as Gaffney (2004, p. 226) — vegetarianism is closely related to caste: caste purity is generally maintained through a strict adherence to a vegetarian diet. The violation of this diet among some Brahmans often requires complex purification rituals to correct.^{cxii} Fuller notes that Brahman castehood is, therefore, often differentiated from other castes by way of dietary practices. Brahmans practise vegetarianism, he argues, in part because this demonstrates their caste's unique religious character and the necessity of renunciation that goes along with it (2004, p. 88). R. S. Khare suggests that vegetarianism helps engender a sense of peacefulness and detachment, which is agreeable to the Brahman religious ideal (1966, p. 237).

However, as we should expect, the notion that vegetarianism is widely practised in India is open to challenge — even the possibility that Brahmans are *obligated* to practise vegetarianism is open to challenge. First of all, Fuller points out that some non-Brahman castes practise vegetarianism, in particular, the Vaishyas and even the Shudras, and this indicates that vegetarianism is not a Brahman-only affair (2004, p. 94).

Furthermore, vegetarianism is not always diligently practised among the Brahmans themselves. As Khare indicates, a high sub-caste within the Kanya-Kabja Brahmans, the Katyayan gotra, readily consumes meat (1966, p. 229; also Fuller 2004, p. 93). This practice conflicts with the conventional view that Brahmans must eat only vegetarian food, because meat is impure and defiling. Khare explains that a number of reasons exist for meat being regarded as legitimate within this particular sub-caste.

First, Khare observes that, historically, some Brahmans had consumed meat reluctantly as a way to improve their martial skills in order that they could go to war with occupying powers (be that the Muslims or the British (1966, p. 234). This is a point that Fuller also considers, who notes that *ksatriyas* (the second highest caste and a warrior caste) consumed meat as a way to improve their physicality (2004, p. 93). Second, an increased interest in tantricism among these Brahmans may have led to meat consumption, since ritual animal slaughter and the consumption of the animal's flesh was a necessary part of tantric ritual (1966, p. 234). Third, it is possible that Muslim practices may have influenced Katyayan diet (1966, p. 235). Finally, and most importantly for Khare, the diet of the Katyayan may have been influenced by factors of modernisation: it was increasingly seen as old-fashioned to maintain a vegetarian diet, and even otherwise traditionalist families would allow their children to eat meat so as to help them to get ahead in modern Indian society where traditional values were being left behind (1966, p. 237).^{cxiii}

One important observation here is that the Brahman rejection of vegetarianism is predicated on a number of contingent factors. These factors are largely social or political in character, and so the obligation of vegetarianism, even within the disciplined Brahman caste,

is a fluid construct that is subject to change and alteration. This is an important observation because, as I demonstrate, the necessity or absence of vegetarianism within Sinhala culture is itself subject to certain social and political whims. This represents another commonality between the Hindu-Indian situation and the Sinhala Buddhist situation: in both cases, vegetarianism and animal welfarism are impacted by social and political considerations.

Having said all that, vegetarianism is still held in a positive light within many different Indian castes. Because vegetarianism is favoured, it implies that the deities ought to be vegetarian, too, and this is the case even for the bloodthirsty deities who demand sacrifice. Fuller therefore observes a tendency within wider Indian culture to reform the gods and try to make them vegetarian (2004, p. 102). Yet, at the same time, these bloodthirsty gods still want their pound of flesh. A tension appears, then, between this attempt at reformation and the actual desires of the gods. Interestingly, this same tension is apparent within Sri Lankan culture as well: the gods are ideally offered vegetarian food, since the gods are pure. This is fine, except in cases such as Kataragama — a violent deity who wants flesh, but is mostly given vegetarian offerings.

II – Non-violence towards Animals in Sinhala Myth

I suggest that these general observations about India can be applied to the case of Sinhala Sri Lanka. I have been at pains to consider the case of Hindu-India because, as I indicated earlier, the Sinhala people of Sri Lanka are heavily influenced by mainland Indian culture. Animal protectionism in India, and the associated dietary practices that tend to follow from such protectionism, have been shown to be fluid and are largely based upon contingent social and political forces.

I have also argued that a tension exists between violent and non-violent practices in the case of Hindu-India, and that this tension can also be expressed in terms of the conflict that arises between vegetarianism and meat eating. In earlier chapters, I have already argued that similar conflicts are present in the case of Buddhism. More specifically, I suggest that a natural tension appears within the Buddhist textual schema between the implication that vegetarianism should be mandatory, and the reality that it is merely voluntary.

In the last half of this thesis, I show that this tension also arises in the lived experiences of Sinhala Buddhists in Sri Lanka. In the course of the remainder of this chapter, I turn more specifically to the historical and mythic case of Sri Lanka, and argue that these sources of tension are also present in the attitudes that Sinhala Buddhists have towards animals and meat eating. I also argue that many of the forces that underlie animal protection practices and dietary practices in Sri Lanka are themselves heavily reliant upon nebulous social and political factors. As I have shown, this too plays a large factor in mainland Indian views about animal welfare and animal protectionism.

(a) The Evil of Animal Hunting in Sinhala Myth

Sinhala culture maintains a rich cultural narrative embossed with many mythic stories and tales. This narrative also maintains a robust discourse concerning non-violence and, in particular, non-violence towards animals.

The *Mahāvamsa* is a chronicle that supposedly details the pre-history and early history of the island of Lanka.^{cxiv} The text discusses how the true history of Sri Lanka only really begins with the arrival of Buddhism.^{cxv} One interesting feature of this arrival is that it interrupts the slaughter of deer. The *Mahāvamsa* relates that Mahinda — the emissary of King Aśoka — arrives on the island and immediately meets the island's King, Devānaṃpiyatissa, who is engaged in a hunting expedition. Mahinda curtails Devānaṃpiyatissa's hunt, and Devānaṃpiyatissa is promptly converted to Buddhism. (Gombrich 2006, p. 186).^{cxvi} The fact that the King's hunt is interrupted is no small coincidence: it indicates that the arrival of Buddhism will lessen violent practices such as hunting. In Chapter 1, I indicated that the *Jātakas* are full of anti-hunting fables, and it seems at least plausible that these stories may have had some effect on the composition of the *Mahāvamsa*.

The *Mahāvamsa*, therefore, indicates that hunting is a suspect activity and that the lives of animals matter. But in considering other Sinhala fables, we discover that the very fate of humanity rests, to some extent, on our kindness towards animals. Sinhala eschatological fables contain a story that relates the cause of the end of the world. The story — which is timeless and, therefore, either a premonition or a tale of the past (or more likely both at once) — is relayed by Gombrich as follows. As materialism and greed increases, Buddhism declines. As a result of this decline, people become increasingly driven by basic lusts and desires. This, of course, leads to greater wickedness and evil, and the more wicked people grow, the shorter their lives become.^{cxvii}

Finally, a great king warns the people of a huge monsoon about to arrive: “Do not get wet,” he says. Ignoring his pleas, the majority of people are drenched in a great deluge. As soon as the water hits their skin, they are turned into wild animals. The remaining people unaffected by the flood are overcome with bloodlust, and a great slaughter begins. Gombrich writes: “In this way all the wicked kill each other till nothing is left but a great pool of blood.” (1991, p. 336) After the slaughter has concluded and all are dead, a few remaining humans emerge from their hiding places. Upon seeing the great slaughter, they are overcome by a feeling of compassion. This “good thought” (*hoṇḍa adahasa*) leads to the cultivation of a small amount of good karma (*pin*). This merit is enough to produce the possibility of a *bodhisattva* at some time the distant future. In short, humanity is saved, because the suffering that the remaining humans is exposed to provides the conditions for the good thought necessary for a future Buddha to be born.^{cxviii}

We find, then, that the advent of Buddhism in Sinhala myth is heavily concerned with images of hunting animals. Hunting animals is bad and, moreover, it leads to great evil — even the destruction of the human race. Conversely, the abandonment of such practices, and the recognition of the evil wrought by these practices, can lead to some form of liberation. Animal protectionism is, therefore, at the very heart of Sinhala Buddhist eschatology. The care of animals is a primary component of the very marrow of Sinhala religious life. Animals also feature prominently in other Sinhala narratives, and these narratives often treat animals with great respect and veneration.

(b) The Importance of the Lion in Sinhala Myth

As we can see, non-violence towards animals features heavily in Sinhala myth. In addition to that, the Sinhala people themselves are traditionally regarded as having come from noble animal stock. The Sinhala people are supposed to have been born from a union between a beautiful princess and a lion. This supposedly explains the name of the Sinhala people: “Sinhala” could be taken to mean “the lion people” (*sinha* [lion] + *la* [a group]). The story can be found in the *Rājāvaliya* (*The Lineage of Kings*), which is a text of some significance in Sinhala myth. It is intended as a chronicle of the development of the Sinhala monarchy.^{cxix} Because the story so well illustrates the importance of the lion in Sinhala culture, I relate the passage in full:

Hereby know the royal race who came to [this] illustrious Lānka. The king of the Kaliṅgu country, who was a Sakviti monarch, gave his daughter to said king. On ascertaining the aspect of the natal star of the said princess^{cxx}, it was discovered that even if she were put in an iron room she should have connection with a lion and bear him children.^{cxxi} When these indications of the star were told to the king he placed her in a seven-storeyed palace, set guards around it, and brought her up. But when the said princess had attained to years of maturity, maddened by lust, she descended privily at night from the upper story, and without knowledge of the guards fell in with a party of merchants: going with them she was seized by a lion in the wilds of the country called Lāḍa. Having cohabited with [the lion] she bore twins, one a son, the other a daughter. (RV, p. 12)

The conclusion of the tale also leads to another anti-animal hunting discourse. The father of the princess is enraged to learn of his daughter’s bestial affair and orders the lion to be killed. In a typical poetic twist, the lion’s own son (the lion-human hybrid) is sent as the king’s

champion. It quickly becomes apparent, however, that the lion cannot be easily slain. Every time the son fired at the lion, each arrow “turned and fell to the ground.” (RV, p. 13)

The lion is only killed when he finally allows himself to be struck by the arrow and thus dies in an act of martyrdom. Not only does this indicate an anti-hunting sentiment in the text, it also paints the lion as a noble and peaceful creature, which only volunteers to die as a way to improve the lot of his children and descendants. Of course, it is implied that this noble quality is passed on to the lion’s descendants, i.e. the Sinhala people. It might also be observed, however, that the boy’s own inclination to try to slay the animal might also be passed on — this again raises further tensions within the Sinhala cultural ethos: hunting animals is bad and pacifistic martyrdom is the one true path, and yet the people are always beholden to acts of slaughter.

The lion story indicates that the Sinhala people are of a noble character. But we also find that they are imbued with miraculous strength, too. The lion-human boy is described as having carried both his sister and his mother on his shoulders using superhuman strength (RV, p. 12). The implication is that this strength is owed to the lion’s blood and that it is transmitted to the Sinhala people. Not only are they courageous and noble, they also physically strong and skilled warriors. Moreover, the image of the lion is attached to Buddhism: the Buddha is described as uttering *dhamma* as a lion would roar. Lion imagery appears again and again throughout the entire Pāli corpus.^{cxii}

The lion is, therefore, greatly venerated in Sinhala myth. Sinhala architecture and art also attest to this. The image of the lion appears prominently on the national flag, and lions have historically been included in architectural designs. For example, King Paṇḍukābhaya (437-367 B.C.) of Anuradhapura “built a rampart 16 *gaw* [in extent], on which were carved figures of lions” and he set up stone pillars throughout the city in the shape of lions (RV, p. 19). We can see, then, that image of the lion is heavily associated with Sinhala national identity, and is an instrument used for developing and building that identity. The Sinhala people, according to this cultural discourse, are compassionate and passive, but also, when necessary, fierce, brave and martial. These qualities are exemplified through these architectural and artistic designs.

(c) Images of Non-Violence in Sinhala Myth

In the previous examples, we find that animal hunting is cast in poor light, which already indicates a positive outlook towards animals in Sinhala myth and legend. We also find that the Sinhala people are associated with a lion, thus elevating at least some animals to a privileged position. But this positive outlook towards animals can be developed even further both in the *Rājāvaliya* and in other textual sources.

Throughout the *Rājāvaliya*, we find that the ontological status of human and animal is very fluid: humans, and human-like beings are constantly transforming into animals. Kuvēṇi — a demoness who later marries prince Vijaya (the first ruler of Lanka) — transforms into both a female dog and also into a mare (RV, pp. 15-16). The deity Rahu transforms himself into a wild boar (RV, p. 18). These animals are, therefore, attributed with higher-order human qualities. We also found that this occurs in the case of the lion that I have discussed. The lion is also described in human terms — it is depicted as “missing its wife and children” and that it is “greatly distressed” by this.

These observations are relevant ethically: one should be reluctant to kill an animal either because it possesses noble human-like qualities (such as the case of the lion) or because it might contain the spirit of a human or a human-like entity (as with the mare and the boar). These sorts of arguments appear directly related to textual arguments already cited in Chapter 1. It seems plausible that a connection exists here between textual pro-animal arguments and arguments that have found their way into Sinhala culture. These sorts of arguments are operating in the background of the comments made by some informants in Chapter 5 and 6 of the thesis.

Another story from the *Rājāvaliya* further cements the evil associated with animal slaughter. According to this legend, King Keḷi anitissa (circa. 100 BC) accidentally confuses his brother with a criminal, and so has him boiled alive. The text reads: “The Elder [the subject of the boiling] perceiving with his divine eyes that retribution was overtaking him for the sin of killing an insect when he was boiling milk in a previous state of existence as a shepherd.” (RV, p. 23) The story concludes with the Elder declaring that the killing of this insect was a “stain on Buddhahood”, that he thus deserved to die, and was, therefore, “burnt up and turned to ashes” (ibid). In short, it was his karma to die in this way due to past evil. According to this tale, then, the mere killing of an insect is a great crime deserving death. One might think that this indicates an enormous sense of compassion towards even the lowest form of animal.

This same sentiment is also conveyed in a Sinhala story found in Buddhaghosa’s *Atthasālanī* (Buddhaghosa is supposed to have studied in the area of Anuradhapura, so it makes sense that some of his texts contain Sinhala mythic tales). In this text, Buddhaghosa reports the case of a young Ceylonese layman called Cakkana. Cakkana’s mother is ill, so a doctor recommends “hare flesh.”^{Cxxiii} With this advice in mind, Cakkana goes hunting for a hare and finally catches one that has been caught in some brambles. Cakkana is on the verge of killing the animal when he realises that “it is not proper that I, for the sake of my mother’s life, should take the life of another.” (Atth, 1.6, p. 136) With this thought, he frees the hare. But upon returning to his home, he is scolded by his brother who sent him in the first place. Nonetheless, he reports his actions to his mother and says that he will never intentionally “take the life of any creature” (ibid). This good thought is so profound that it

instantly cures the mother of her illness (Atth, 1.6, p. 137). A good thought towards animals can have powerful effects: it can cure an illness or, as we note in the eschatological drama, it can revive the very foundations of Buddhism.

Bryce Ryan reports that historical Sinhala sources have sometimes attributed the existence of low castes to immoral occupations, such as fishing. For example, he states that:

One version of the *Janavaṇṇa* attributes a low position to the fishing people on the grounds that they sinned, 'in the taking of life without mercy'. (1953, p. 12)

The *Janavaṇṇa* is a 15th C.E. poem, possibly written by a monk, which provides a detailed account of the Sinhala caste system and attributes to them certain mythic origins (ibid, p. 5; de Silva, 2005, p. 121). It is interesting to observe the way in which the Sinhala caste system is influenced here by Buddhist moral presuppositions, and that the fishing (*karāva*) caste is singled out as problematic due to its apparent lack of concern for animals.

The earlier tales indicate a strong anti-hunting stance and a sense of respect, sometimes veneration, towards animals — in particular, noble animals, such as the lion. In the mythic stories discussed here, we find that this discourse is extended to such a degree that human lives are put at risk, or even lost, in order to preserve the life of animals. I demonstrate in Chapters 1 and 2 that all life is sacred, particularly animal and human life. In that textual analysis, I include numerous tales of human sacrifice in order that animals might live. We can see that these same tales are repeated in an altered form within Sinhala myth and legend. In the next section, I note that this pro-attitude towards animal protectionism is not only an artifact of Sinhala myth; it is also present in Sinhala history.

III – Non-Violence Towards Animals in Sinhala History

In this section, I turn towards more concrete historical examples of non-violence towards animals in Sinhala history. As is the case of animal protectionism in India, at least some of the motivations for animal protectionism in Sri Lanka are politically motivated. In due course, I connect this observation to some of the mythic cases I have described in the previous sections.

One of the interesting points about animal protectionism as a political force is that it finds its roots as a way of resisting colonial pressure either by Portuguese or by British colonists. Just as Hindu-India used the cow protection ideology as a way to help develop a Hindu identity as a means of confronting Muslim and British colonisation, so, too, do the

Sinhala Buddhists develop their own ideology of animal protectionism as a way to cement a contrast between themselves and their ethnic rivals, be they Muslim, British or Tamil. I return to this point again throughout the remainder of this chapter.

Another point to note considering Sinhala history is the way in which animal welfarism is deeply embedded in Sinhala culture, even prior to foreign occupation: foreign occupation only caused animal welfarism to be elevated to a position of political and racial significance. The a priori nature of animal welfarism is made somewhat apparent in our examination of the Kandyan kingdom as recorded by Robert Knox in his journals.

(a) Animal Welfare in the Kandyan Kingdom

Robert Knox (1641-1720) was a captain in the British East India Company who became imprisoned in the interior of Sri Lanka (then known as Ceylon) from 1659 onwards by the Kandyan King, King Rājasiṃha II. He finally escaped in 1679, and a memoir of his time on the island appeared in 1881. The text, *A Historical Relation of Ceylon*, provides an influential and important insight into medieval Sri Lanka. The book so impressed his contemporaries that John Locke, in his major political treatise, *Two Treatises of Government*, used the case of King Rājasiṃha II's reign as an example of the evils associated with a tyrannical monarchy.^{cxxiv}

The text is noteworthy for at least two reasons. First, because it shows that food practices during that period are largely continuous with food practices in contemporary Sri Lanka. Second, because we find that vegetarianism was, as it is now, considered laudable, even if the practice was not mandatory. This latter point is particularly significant, because it reflects a common view expressed by informants in the ethnographic research I discuss in the last two chapters of the thesis.

Knox was a prisoner of the king, but he was permitted, to a large extent, to wander the kingdom and make a living for himself. In the course of his wanderings, Knox observed that the Sinhala people had an appetite for almost every type of animal: hogs were hunted for food using pit traps (1958, p. 43) and fowl were hunted for food — except for fowl owned by the King, since they were used to ornament his gardens (ibid, pp. 45-46). The rivers around the Kandyan kingdom were flush with fish, and Knox reports that fish comprised a significant portion of their diet (ibid, p. 46). They also ate some more unusual animals: *kabaragoya* (water monitor lizards) were considered aggressive and inedible, but the flesh of *thalagoya* (land monitor lizards) was considered a delicacy (ibid, p. 50). Knox even states that they sometimes ate monkeys (ibid, p. 42).

On the topic of deer, Knox observes that the people hunted and killed them by blinding them with large torches and then shooting them with arrows (ibid, p. 42): obviously, this seems to go against the fair chase principles championed in the *Mahāvāṇṇsa*, where it is

said that one should “not shoot an animal while it is inattentive” (see note 8). This indicates already that a tension exists between the ethos underlying ideal moral conduct towards animals and the actual conduct maintained by ordinary people. In fact, all the examples thus stated are all contrary to the anti-hunting principles extolled not only in the *Mahāvāṃsa* (which would have existed and been known in some form during this period), but also implicitly within the eschatological myth that Gombrich discusses.

In spite of the fact that animals were widely hunted, Knox nonetheless reports instances where the people also extended great compassion towards animals. These actions are more in keeping with the pro-animal sentiment described in the previous mythic tales. For example, Knox provides the example of leeches: because villagers typically went barelegged, leeches would routinely attach themselves to peoples’ limbs. Knox writes that people sometimes tried to remove the leeches, but observed that:

[...] this is somewhat troublesome, and they come on again so fast and so numerous, that it is not worth their while [to remove them]: and generally they suffer them to bite and remain on their legs during the Journey; and they do the more patiently permit them, because it is wholesome for them. (ibid, p. 41-42)

“More wholesome for them” has a double meaning: more wholesome for the leech, because it ensures that the leech may live, but also more wholesome for the host, because in allowing the leech to feed, the human does the leech a service and, therefore, attracts merit/good karma (pin).

In general, vegetarianism and abstinence from animal violence are regarded favourably. Knox writes:

They reckon the chief poynts of goodness to consist in giving to the Priests, in making Pudigahs [he means doing *pūjā*], sacrifices to their Gods, [and] in forbearing shedding the blood of any creature. (p. 135, I have retained Knox’s original spelling.)

The latter, Knox notes, is “Pou boi, a great sin” (ibid). This view is completely compliant with the Buddha’s ethical teaching as I discuss in detail in Chapter 1. However, of special interest to us here is Knox’s observation that this concern with animal welfare should develop into full-blown vegetarianism. He observes that some engage in the practice of “abstaining from eating flesh at all, because they would not have a hand, or any thing to do with, [the] killing [of] any living thing.” (ibid, pp. 135-136) He concludes from this that such people regard

vegetarianism as mandatory: “they reckon that Herbs and Plants [are the] more innocent food.” (ibid, p. 136)

These observations indicate that the Kandyan people recognised and endorsed the principle of non-violence preached in the canonical texts. Furthermore, they believed that this principle also entailed vegetarianism. As I show in the next chapter, this attitude towards vegetarianism is in continuation with modern Sinhala Buddhist views concerning non-violence and diet. The views that Knox describes are also continuous with the modern view, insofar as, although vegetarianism is endorsed, it is not always widely practised.

Another continuation of modern views is the attitudes that the monastics are reported to have held. Knox writes that, while monks do not kill or harm animals, they eat animal flesh if it is supplied to them by the laity. This is the general custom in modern Sri Lanka, and is almost entirely owed to the fact that monastics believe that it is their place only to accept food offered to them and not to discriminate. Nonetheless, as I indicate in the last chapter, this point is complicated by the fact that some monks who are vegetarian believe that refusal is allowable. Further to this, I indicate in Chapter 3 (see p. 101) that, theoretically, refusal of certain foods is allowable in principle.

There is a third continuation of importance here, but this time it is a continuation of prevailing Hindu-Indian sentiments concerning cow slaughter. Knox reports that the Kandyans viewed the killing of cows as completely unacceptable: “Beef here may not be eaten, it is abominable.” (ibid, p. xvii) We further discover, through Knox, that the Kandyans viewed beef eaters with special disdain. White foreigners were subject to a unique insult: they were called “beef-eating slaves” (ibid). Saparamadu, editor of the 1958 edition of Knox’s book, observes that Buddhism in Kandyan society was not as we know it today, and was much more influenced by Brahmanical attitudes and mores. Hence, the killing of cows was regarded as very bad, in large part because the Kandyans followed the Hindu customs described earlier in this chapter. Nonetheless, we find in due course that modern Sinhala also hold cows in special regard, though perhaps not to the same degree as in Kandyan society.

The fact that beef consumption was used as an insult is important, partly because it foreshadowed political and racial divisions that became increasingly pronounced as Sinhala society assumed greater contact with foreign occupiers. We can see here that the insult “beef-eating slave” is used as a way to distinguish between white foreigners, who live a decadent and immoral life, and the pure Sinhala, who are concerned with the welfare of animals (even if they do not practise their protectionist view perfectly). This attitude towards the diet of foreigners is further underscored by the fact that, historically, Christians and Catholics in Sri Lanka have been subject to similar dietary disparagement. The next section deals with this particular issue.

(b) Hostility Towards the Portuguese Diet

In the previous section, I observe that Knox reports on the Kandyan Buddhists' view of vegetarianism with considerable praise, and that they particularly shunned the consumption of beef. This attitude developed in a direction of discrimination towards foreigners based upon the fact that the foreign diet violated Sinhala dietary conventions. But this general hostility towards the foreign diet is also evident in other areas of Sinhala history.

I discuss two particular examples of this type of polemical discourse here. The first example is found in *The Carpenter Prēta Tale*. This folktale originated during the period of the Portuguese occupation, and it indicates both a veneration of vegetarian practices and a repudiation of meat eating, the latter being associated with white foreigners. The second example relates to comments made by influential Buddhists, including Anāgārika Dhammapala. Dhammapala endorses vegetarianism as the most suitable diet for a devout Buddhist layperson, and also associated meat eating with decadent Christian behaviour. I discuss Dhammapala and others like him in the next section.

Vegetarianism is (as in the case of Knox) not only motivated by ethical and religious considerations; it is also a way to develop a Buddhist identity that helps buttress against foreign forces of colonisation. It is plausible, therefore, to connect the animal welfare movement in Sri Lanka to the animal welfare movement in India to the extent that they both arise, in part, as a response to foreign occupation.

Richard Fox Young's detailed study of *The Carpenter Prēta Tale* is the first example that I discuss in support of this point. The folktale is essentially a piece of Buddhist propaganda aimed at undermining the Christian religion. It does this by reappropriating the Christ legend, and depicts Jesus as a *prēta*, a hungry ghost who craves after flesh. In the tale, Jesus is described as a rascal and thief who "drinks liquor, eats flesh, and calls himself a god." (1995, p. 61) Young describes this as "a violation of Buddhist ethics" and thus helps to cast Christianity in a bad light and bolster the image of Buddhism (ibid). Jesus is further described as "propagating the false doctrine that animals have no soul and may therefore be eaten." (ibid) His hunger for animal flesh is such that he and his band habitually:

[...] break into the city and steal goats and cattle from [the] pens. They eat the meat and wash it down with toddy stolen from somewhere or other. (1998, p. 90)

It is this general craving for flesh that leads to their downfall — a group of merchants trick Jesus' followers into betraying him. Jesus is consequently executed and his body buried deep underground. In completion of the tale, Jesus is reborn as a hungry ghost for his crime of desiring after wine and flesh.

It is important to contextualise this story in two ways. First, the context of the tale is the Portuguese occupation of Sri Lanka. It was clear from the start of the occupation that Sinhala Buddhists regarded Portuguese meat eating as a morally dubious practice, to say the least. Young describes an early Sinhala report of Portuguese colonists:

There is in our harbour in Colombo a race of people fair of skin and comely withal. They don jackets of iron and hats of iron; they rest not a minute in one place; they walk here and there; they eat hunks of stone and drink blood; they give two or three pieces of gold and silver and one fish for a lime; the report of their canon is louder than thunder when it bursts upon the rock Yugandhara. Their canon balls fly many *gawwa* and shatter fortresses of granite. (Young, 1995, p. 54)

That the Portuguese are described as “eating stone and drinking blood” is relevant because, according to Young’s philological analysis, “eating stone” is a synonym for “eating meat” in old Sinhala (1995, p. 54). As Young says: “In the Sinhala imagination a craving for flesh and blood is characterized [with] demons and or wandering ghosts (*prēta*).” (ibid) Young also observes that the “stone and blood” formula could refer to sacramental bread and wine consumed by Catholics; but Young regards the view that “stone” refers to bread as being contestable. In any case, the upshot is the same: because of the Catholic principle of transubstantiation, the sacramental bread is essentially flesh anyway (the flesh of Christ). So, it is possible that, for the Sinhala as for the Portuguese, the difference between bread and flesh is of little real significance.

The importance of sacramental offering is further reinforced by other Sinhala folktales. Another story tells of a Sinhala Buddhist who dreams of a “man in golden clothing [who] had a goblet of liquor in one hand and a fistful of flesh in the other.” (1998, p. 66) This dream is told as a portent for the coming of the Portuguese, and it also relates to the foreshadowing of their Catholic religion, which so conspicuously involves the consumption of flesh and alcohol.

The fact that Catholics were associated with the consumption of flesh and wine is significant because it illustrates the way that diet is used to develop national identities. The Sinhala Buddhists view the Catholics and their religion as meat consumers — the Buddhists, on the other hand, idealise vegetarianism or at least the non-consumption of large animals like cows. We can see precisely why the Catholics are then cast in a bad light: they engage in unwholesome dietary practices that are considered un-Buddhist.

This is particularly evident in light of the fact that the beef consumption, as Knox observes, was so poorly viewed. This is no doubt due to the Indian-Hindu influences that I

described earlier, which have been integrated into the Buddhist view. Furthermore, the fact that Catholics maintain the real presence of Christ in the sacrament further reveals the un-Buddhist nature of their practices: Buddhists would view this as cannibalism, something that is condemned in the Buddhist canon (I discuss this in detail in Chapters 1 to 3).

The second point of context is that these folktales arise as part of an attempt at Buddhist revivalism in Sri Lanka during the Portuguese occupation. This revivalist movement was spearheaded largely by Kandyan monastics, in particular Vālivita Saranaṃkara. Vālivita Saranaṃkara was concerned that the Kandyan king, Kīrti Śrī Rājasiṃha (r.1747-82) was unduly influenced by Catholic political factions. Catholics took a special interest in the Theravāda attitude towards meat consumption, and saw that this represented a break between Buddhism and Catholicism. Young reports that Catholic Oratorian, Jacome Gonçaves, was particularly opposed to Buddhist anti-meat eating: “In tract upon tract in mellifluous Sinhalese he drew distinctions between spirit, soul, and anima, thereby justifying meat consumption.” (1995, p. 51) The purpose of such discourses was, of course, to try to inculcate Buddhists into a more sympathetic view of Catholicism and its meat-based diet.

Vālivita Saranaṃkara did not take these attacks lying down: he petitioned the king to “enforce the Buddhist prohibition against the consumption of wine and meat” (1995, p. 52). The purpose of this prohibition was to target the Catholic missionary work I have described. A report by a Catholic missionary group reads:

[Vālivita Saranaṃkara] called upon [Rājasiṃha] to issue an edict... that all pigs and hens should be set free and that there should be no breeding of animals for food. (in Young, 1995, p. 52)

Young adds: “No other monarch [referring to Vijaya Rājasiṃha] is considered to have been so as he in promoting abstinence, vegetarianism, and the protection of animals.” (ibid) Vālivita Saranaṃkara was, therefore, successful in his persecution of Catholic efforts to affect Buddhist diet, and these folktales should be viewed in light of these political conflicts and machinations.

The Carpenter Prēta Tale shows how the Buddhists maligned Portuguese colonists predominantly because of their lax diet, a diet that featured meat consumption. We see that, as with the case of Knox, food practices are an important way of developing national identities in Sri Lanka. In this way, a case for Buddhism can be made, but only if the ideal of vegetarianism is operating in the background. The Buddhist diet is the more ethical one because it implicitly suggests that such a diet is the less violent and more compassionate. The Catholics, on the other hand, engage in violent practices, be it the domination of the land

and people with their advanced weapons, or through their diets that require that animals be slaughtered.

(c) Hostility Towards the British Diet

Obviously, a historical precedent is evident for Sinhala Buddhists denouncing non-Sinhala on the basis of their diet. The Portuguese colonists, and their Catholic religion, are characterised as being violent and maintaining an irreligious diet. In the following, we find that this criticism is also applied to the British occupation of Sri Lanka. One unusual feature of the discourses surrounding British occupation is that at least some of the discourses flow, not from Sinhala resisters, but from native British subjects who sympathised with the Sinhala Buddhist and wished to revive their culture in the face of British oppression. We can, therefore, see that the pro-animal vegetarian discourses that I examine here are influenced not only by native Sinhala folk tales, but also by outside, Western colonial sources.

Of special note here is Henry Steel Olcott. He was a founding member of the Theosophical Society and took a special interest in Buddhism — and all other Oriental religions — as a way to advance his case for a universal religion, which he and his associates named Theosophy. He had travelled with Madame Blavatsky (another important figure in the Theosophy movement) to Sri Lanka in 1880 and immediately “converted” to Theravāda Buddhism. Olcott and Blavatsky’s aim was to revive Theravāda Buddhism on the island. They believed that the religion had decayed under foreign rule. This revivalism can be seen as an extension of the revivalism motivated by earlier monastics (which I have already mentioned), such as Vālivita Saranaṃkara in Kandy. Just as with Vālivita Saranaṃkara, this revivalism was partly concerned with proper diet. But, unlike Vālivita Saranaṃkara, this revivalism stemmed first of all from foreign assistance.

In his article on Olcott’s Buddhist revivalism, Prothero points out that Olcott was impressed by Buddhism as a religion, but was unimpressed with the manner in which Sinhala Buddhists had degraded the religion. This attitude was, of course, based upon an orientalist conception of “Original Buddhism” as a perfectly rational, non-violent religion that had since been subject to much modification due to cultural accretions. Olcott began writing tracts in support of a return to this “Original Buddhism”, which he hoped would also cure the Sinhala of their moral impoverishment (Olcott not only dabbled in orientalism, but was also overtly racist at times). Prothero writes: “Like his *Buddhist Catechism*, which aimed to eradicate mass ignorance, these compilations sought to uplift the Asians out of their supposed moral degradation.” (1995, p. 291)

In his *The Golden Rules of Buddhism* (1887), Olcott aims to rectify this moral degradation in part by encouraging vegetarianism, which he regards as a natural product of Buddhism. Prothero states: “Olcott enjoined vegetarianism (‘One who buys butcher’s meat or

poultry violates [the Buddhist scriptures]’).” (1995, p. 291) The full passage from *The Golden Rules* reads: “One who buys butcher’s meat or poultry violates the gāthā. For by paying the butcher’s for meat he has killed, the buyer shares his sin by ‘sanctioning’ his act.” (1887, n. 1, p. 2) The passage to which Olcott refers is a *sutta* discussing how the Buddhist should not destroy any sort of life. As I argue in Chapter 3, Olcott is wrong to directly move from the directive not to kill to the directive to become a vegetarian without first observing the textual evidence that the Buddha also requires that his followers encourage people not to kill. Nonetheless, Olcott’s suppositions probably also stem from English vegetarian societies, which were flourishing in England during the period of his writing (societies that Gandhi frequented when he was studying in England, and that subsequently also greatly influenced his own views).

Prothero observes that Olcott promoted various liberal ideas such as “women’s rights [...] caste reform, vegetarianism [...] prison reform [...] and above all universal religion” (ibid, p. 293). He combined this with more conservative ideas, such as chastity and temperance. But in all cases, Olcott attributed to an idealised, and downright orientalist, conception of the Buddha’s teaching: Olcott seems to have conceived of the Buddha as being a kind of enlightened Victorian gentleman and rationalist.^{cxxv}

Olcott was a British subject who converted to Buddhism, endorsed vegetarianism and rejected the traditional English meat-based diet. He was critical of Sinhala Buddhists, whom he believed were lax, and wanted a Buddhist revival that, in part, involved vegetarianism. As we can see, Olcott was ultimately too unconventional for most Sinhala Buddhists, but his revival movement was transmitted to native Sinhala people, which developed into a type of Buddhism that has been called Protestant Buddhism (see Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988).^{cxxvi} Key in this movement is Anagārika Dhammapala (1864-1933). Like Olcott before him, he viewed vegetarianism as a natural extension of the Buddha’s teachings.

Dhammapala was a key figure in Buddhist revivalism. He was not a monastic, nor was he a conventional *upāsaka*. He was a renunciant — as a monastic is — but he dressed in white and maintained lay vows. He was essentially a political figure who was critical in the Sinhala nationalist movement, which largely involved the development and revival of Buddhism in the face of British Christian missionary activities — activities that had somewhat eroded support for Buddhism (though Christian missionary work was never very successful in Sri Lanka).

Dhammapala was a proponent of vegetarianism and a critic of animal hunting (anti-animal-hunting discourse is a theme of Sinhala ethical writings, it would appear). In his autobiography, he reports that he hated his Christian schoolmasters because they ate meat and shot birds for game (Gombrich 2006, p. 186). In his *Daily Code for the Laity* (sin. *Gihi Vinaya*) (1898), Dhammapala argues that a proper interpretation of the Buddhist *dhamma* demands a strict vegetarian diet.^{cxxvii}

As Gombrich, Obeyesekere and Prothero all observe, Dhammapala had a significant impact on modern Sinhala Buddhism. In particular, Gombrich & Obeyesekere argue that *Dhammapala* was part of a “protestant” reformation movement in Sinhala society that aimed to ensure that the laity was more involved in its religious affairs, and that these were not strictly monastic activities. It might therefore be argued that, given the popularity of Dhammapala’s protestant reformation, the view that vegetarianism is a proper dietary practice for a devout Buddhist might stem — to some extent — from modern developments in Sinhala Buddhism. This is doubly confirmed by the fact that vegetarianism is regarded more positively by laity than by monastics. I establish this fact in more detail in the latter chapters.

IV – Non-violence and Vegetarianism in Modern Sri Lanka

The previous sections outline the historical and mythological precedent for non-violence towards animals in Sri Lanka. I also examine the ways in which this non-violence has influenced dietary practices, in particular the dietary practice of vegetarianism. I maintain that, post-colonisation and European settlement, anti-meat discourses were on the rise and a pro-vegetarian discourse was emerging among devout Buddhists.

In this final section, I argue that this pro-attitude towards vegetarianism persists in the modern era and has been established in a limited way by contemporary ethnographic studies, most notably conducted by Gombrich & Obeyesekere. In line with the previous analysis, however, it must be supposed that multiple explanations exist for the pro-vegetarian view. Apart from the obvious Buddhist explanation, I also consider other possible explanations — in particular, the possibility that vegetarianism is the consequence of political forces. In this way, the non-violence movement connects back to the Indian case insofar as these attitudes also find their roots in politico-ethnic conflict as much as they do in religiosity.

(a) The *Mahāvamsa* and anti-Tamil Rhetoric

Earlier, the *Mahāvamsa* was described as implicitly rejecting animal hunting and that this view of non-violence was introduced to Sri Lanka only through the arrival of Buddhism. Here, I want to observe other relevant events in the *Mahāvamsa* for the purpose of showing a tension within these mythic-historical texts that indicate both a martial spirit within the Sinhala, and a desire to renounce violence, and that the desire to renounce violence (often thwarted as it is by invaders and the like) is a touchstone for separating the Sinhala identity from non-Sinhala.

It is a well-established fact that Sinhala ethnic identity is informed to a large extent by the *Mahāvamsa* and the stories found therein. On this point, Stanley Tambiah writes: “Most important of all, an appeal to the past glories of Buddhism and Sinhalese civilization celebrated in the *Mahāvamsa* and other chronicles as a way of infusing the Sinhalese with a new nationalist identity and self-respect in the face of humiliation and restrictions suffered under British rule and Christian missionary influence.” (1992, p. 7) Tambiah observes a

violent streak in the *Mahāvamsa*. The *Mahāvamsa* recognises the virtues of non-violence, but, when fighting occupying forces, this state of non-violence can be temporarily suspended. This is acceptable, provided that it is for the purpose of preserving the Sinhala people and the Buddhism that they protect.

In defence of this point, I consider the tale of King Duṭṭhaḡamaṇī (r.161-137 B.C.), who defeated the Tamil King Elara (r.235–161 B.C.). Elara ruled Sri Lanka for forty years, but was ultimately conquered by Duṭṭhaḡamaṇī. The *Mahāvamsa* reveals that, having slaughtered thousands of Tamils, Duṭṭhaḡamaṇī had misgivings about his bloody conquest. Rather than celebrate, Duṭṭhaḡamaṇī is remorseful, saying: "In truth, venerable sirs, how can there be comfort to me in that I caused the destruction of a great army of myriads of men?" (MV, p. 252) Here we find Duṭṭhaḡamaṇī aware of the evils of killing, which is, as we are by now aware, a considerable vice in Buddhism. Yet, the monks to whom Duṭṭhaḡamaṇī speaks excuse him because his war was a just one. After all, it was a war necessary to defend Buddhism against the evil Tamils, who, says his monastic advisers, are barely human. In fact, they are only half human:

There is no hindrance on the way to heaven because of your acts. Ruler of men, only one and a half-men were killed here. One was established in the Refuges and the other only in the Five Precepts. The others were heretical and evil and died as though they were animals. You will make the Buddha's faith shine in many ways. Therefore, Lord of Men, cast away your mental confusion. (ibid)

Conflict arises, then, over whether violence is or is not appropriate.^{cxxviii} The Buddhist monks themselves justify its use on utilitarian grounds: it is better that some die so that Buddhism can be saved. In any case, they say that those who were killed (i.e. the Tamils) are like animals and therefore matter less.^{cxxix}

From this we can gather that the Sinhala identity is constructed under two influences: first, a reluctance to commit violent acts because of the first principles of Buddhism; and second, a recognition that the Sinhala people are a martial race who, when threatened, will reluctantly utilise their prowess in order to crush their enemies. We see that this martial skill finds its mythic origins in the *Rājāvaliya*, where the Sinhala people originate from lions and thus inherit the strength, power and valour of the lion. Duṭṭhaḡamaṇī represents both the peaceful side of the Sinhala people and their violent martial side.

We also see that the construction of the Sinhala identity occurs in contrast to other non-Sinhala people. The *Mahāvamsa* describes the Tamils as martial, but they are not as powerful as the Sinhala people in the end. More importantly, they are depicted as showing no

remorse or reluctance to kill, unlike the Sinhala people, who immediately regret the slaughter. Therefore, while both sides are martial, it is only the Sinhala who see things from a perspective of non-violence (even if they ultimately decide that the violence is allowed). This observation relates back to the Portuguese and British cases: there we see that Sinhala identity was constructed through a discourse of non-violence and vegetarianism up and against the violence and bloody dietary practices that characterised the Christian colonists. We observe that the genesis of this discourse is already in operation in the *Mahāvamsa*, and note the way in which the Sinhala identity was constructed in opposition to the Tamil “invaders”.

This anti-Tamil discourse is particularly important in the modern context because, as Tambiah outlines above, the *Mahāvamsa*, and other similar documents, are used by nationalist elements to develop discourses that oppose the Tamils and other ethnic minorities. Part of that nationalism might involve a glorification of the martial powers of the Sinhala people, but it might also encourage the non-violent side, too. This is what may be occurring in the case of the vegetarian movement within Sinhala Buddhist society today.

(b) Vegetarianism and Animal Non-violence

A number of modern ethnographers have already undertaken to discuss the contemporary practice of vegetarianism in Sri Lanka. In particular, Gombrich notes that vegetarianism, while being viewed as a morally laudable activity, is nonetheless not widely practised. Gombrich writes: “Vegetarianism I found universally admired, but rarely practiced.” (1991, p. 305) This observation also relates back to Knox’s reports from the 1600s — Knox reports that vegetarianism was well regarded and was considered a pious activity even if it was a diet not always diligently followed by the general population. Similarly, in his historical analysis of the avoidance of flesh consumption, Simoons writes that, “In Sri Lanka, Sinhalese Buddhists have strong religious objections to killing animals or raising livestock for slaughter, but, despite this, many of them eat beef, which can be readily purchased.” (1994, p. 115)^{cxix} The claim that beef eating is common can be disputed, but certainly Simoons’ general observation that meat eating is a norm fits with the rest of the anthropological evidence.

Gombrich and Obeyesekere note that the avoidance of vegetarianism is in part due to the fact that Sinhala Buddhists see no connection between the principle of non-violence and meat eating and therefore do not see vegetarianism as a necessary Buddhist activity. They write that the precept not to kill “has not generally been so interpreted as to impose.” (1988, p. 28) Martin Southwold also notes that, in his anthropological research, the abstention of animal slaughter was listed as a key Buddhist virtue amongst his informants (1983, p. 66, p. 175). The principle of non-violence is therefore a key ethical duty.^{cxixi} He does not mention, however, that vegetarianism follows from this. Although not speaking specifically about Sri Lanka, Seyfort-Ruegg agrees with these observations:

Although the idea of Ahimsā, ‘non-harming,’ is generally proclaimed and respected in Buddhist thought and practice, what might seem to be its logical corollary, namely abstention from eating the flesh of animals killed for their meat is [...] far from practiced in most parts of the Buddhist world. (1980, p. 234)

I argue in Chapter 3 that an implicit connection exists between non-violence and vegetarianism in the Buddhist scripture. Further, I show in the next chapter that many Sinhala Buddhist informants themselves spontaneously make this connection, and that the first precept plays a significant role in the attitudes that Buddhist vegetarians — and, indeed, non-vegetarians — take towards proper diet.

Obeyesekere^{cxxxii} supports the notion that the first precept is relevant to vegetarianism. He observes that people who aspire to be “better Buddhists” are often vegetarians:

In Ceylon, although meat eating is common, all castes recognize that ideally such an act is a violation of ahimsa. Thus, everyone subscribes to an ideal of vegetarianism, but the fulfilment of the ideal does not depend on one’s caste affiliations but on one’s religious affiliations. (1963, p. 145)

In this study, Obeyesekere goes on to argue that animal killing is always wrong, and that this further implies the necessity of vegetarianism. Obeyesekere reports that even hunters occasionally regard hunting as being improper and thus condemn their own occupation (in Gombrich 1991, p. 298). This fact alone further cements the degree to which animal killing is condemned in Sinhala culture. Gombrich reports that butchers shops are boycotted because they depend upon animal slaughter (1991, p. 304). Jha argues, however, that this boycott of butcheries may be motivated by racial politics more so than by ethics. He says:

In Sri Lanka beef occupies a low position in the hierarchy of meat types but this has been attributed to the ‘entrepreneurial antagonisms’ between the Muslims who control the meat business and the aggressive Buddhist mercantile and professional class belonging to the caste of fishermen. (2002, p. 71)

If Jha is right, then this boycott of butcheries reported by Gombrich is an extension of anti-Muslim sentiment rather than an expression of Buddhist piety. However, I prefer to argue that it is an expression of both: the aim is to continue to reinforce the Sinhala Buddhist identity, an identity constituted by a deep love of animals, which ultimately finds its expression up and against rival ethnic and religious groups. The fact that this helps Sinhala businesses is a convenient and attractive side effect. This, of course, further confirms the fact that animal welfarism in Sri Lanka depends upon certain ethnic-political conflicts and that animal welfare is a space in which Sinhala Buddhist identity develops.

The ideal of the vegetarian Sinhala Buddhist continues to broach the political sphere to the extent that, in some cases, monastic vegetarianism has been enforced by the government. According to Abeyesekere, the government made vegetarianism compulsory for dissident monks who were being “redisCIPLINED.” In his discussion of politics in contemporary Sri Lanka, Abeyesekere reports that elements of the Premadāsa government during the 1980s dealt with monks who engaged in rebellious activities by sending them to re-education camps. This partly involved them being forced to become vegetarians, since the authorities regarded this as the proper monastic diet (2001, p. 39). This is interesting because it illustrates how lay expectations can be forced upon the monastic institution. Although the Premadāsa government instituted these policies as a way to control monastic dissidents, it no doubt also represents an earnest attempt to regulate monastic behaviour and make monks more “monkly”.

Here we can see that modern ethnographic research has already intimated that many Sinhala Buddhists view vegetarianism in a positive light, and that this may or may not stem from the endorsement of the first precept. We can also see that there are ways in which vegetarianism and animal welfarism broach identity politics. In one case, a Buddhist identity is being established voluntarily as a way to highlight racial and religious differences (as with the case of the Muslim butchers), or that this Buddhist identity is being imposed externally (as is the case with the Premadāsa government enforcing vegetarianism on dissident monks). This political aspect should be kept in mind for the next two chapters, because it colours some of my subsequent interpretations.

(c) Meat Consumption and the Supernatural

Another example of pro-vegetarian attitudes can be found in studying exorcist and black magic rituals. This is because these Sinhala rituals specifically endorse only non-meat sacrifices, which can be contrasted with their mainland Indian counterparts (as I have mentioned), who do encourage the killing of living beings. In contrast to this, no religious rituals in Buddhist Sri Lanka allow the slaughter of animals. This almost certainly stems from the criticism of animal slaughter made in the Pāli texts, as I discuss in Chapter 2 (pp. 39-41). This is partly because meat consumption is viewed as a “low activity” fit only for evil creatures

and demons. Take, for example, the Sinhala exorcism rituals that are practised in particular along the south coastal areas (exorcism = *yakṣabhūta vidhyāva*, i.e. “the science of spirits/demons”). Gombrich claims that meat offerings are most often associated with demons (*yakṣo*) and exorcisms. He writes:

But the Buddhist values of compassion and non-violence have dictated that no god can receive blood-sacrifice: any supernatural being who demands an animal victim is ipso facto a devil, inherently cruel and therefore below man in the scale of being. (2006, p. 144)

Gombrich & Obeyesekere similarly observe that, according to the traditional Sinhala view of deities, Kālī cannot be considered a benevolent god because she requires a blood sacrifice (*bili*). Nonetheless, because of her malevolent nature, she is also popular, because her evil disposition makes her simultaneously powerful and effective as a medium for witchcraft and black magic (1988, p. 34).

Meat is only offered by Sinhala Buddhists in sacrificial contexts to demons, and only out of a motive of disrespect (unlike in the Indian case where the gods to whom the animal is sacrificed are deeply respected). In his detailed study of Sinhala exorcism rituals, Kapferer observes that demons are treated with considerable disrespect, and that part of the purpose of the exorcism ceremony is to diminish the demon’s power through ridicule (1991). This shows that demons have a low status in Sinhala consciousness. This is also obvious from the types of food they offer to these gods compared to the respected and venerated gods who receive only pure food. Obeyesekere notes that, because gods (*devo*) are considered “noble beings”, they are typically “offered vegetarian foods” during worshipping ceremonies (1963, p. 144). But with demons:

The food given to them is *pulata*, or burnt meat, fish or egg. Often some blood from a chicken is offered to them also. (1963, p. 144)

Obeyesekere makes explicit that the type of food offered is related to purity: good beings receive pure food (vegetarian food), while evil beings receive impure food (i.e. meat, fish, eggs, etc.). It should be observed also that no actual sacrifice takes place in these contexts: meat is offered to these demons, but no animal is actually sacrificed for them. I discuss this now in greater detail.

Even higher-ranking demons are considered pure enough to receive vegetarian food. Bruce Kapferer writes: “Unlike Riri Yaksa and Mahasona, Kalu Yaka receives relatively pure vegetables and grains and no meats.” (1991, p. 194) He adds that the offerings given to Riri Yaka are similar to that of Kalu Yaka but “with the addition of roasted meats from land and water creatures (*godadiyamas*) and blood (*le*) drawn from the comb of a cock.” (1991, p. 195) Note that, although the remains of animals are used in these ceremonies (roasted meats, blood), no animal is actually sacrificed in the process of the ceremony, unlike some Indian-Hindu rituals in mainland India.

Quite often, animals are only symbolically sacrificed. Kapferer reports that, in Mahasona ceremonies, “a cock is an indispensable part of every exorcism” (ibid). He explains that the cock acts as a human surrogate: a cock is similar to a human in that it walks on two legs, and, because demons are particularly stupid, they cannot tell the difference. However, the animal sacrifice is sanitised to the degree that the cock is only symbolically slaughtered (Gombrich 1988, p. 140). Hans Feddema believes that this substitution is a key part of the exorcism process. Like Gombrich and Kapferer, he observes that real animal sacrifice has been replaced with symbolic sacrifice (1995, p. 136).

Even the most malicious demon only receives symbolic animal sacrifices. This is partly because the Sinhala exorcist cannot bring himself to sacrifice an animal, and therefore attract much demerit (*pav*).^{cxxxiii} It is a social norm that animal sacrifice is wrong. This practice must be quite old, because Knox also reports that exorcism ceremonies in the Kandyan kingdom only required animals to be slaughtered symbolically (1958, p. 124). The reason for this sanitisation is partly prudential: animal sacrifice was outlawed in 1980.^{cxxxiv}

Other ritual spaces take place in which animal sacrifices are replaced with more sanitised non-violent practices, namely black magic. For example, an island temple is dedicated to a malevolent local deity called Devoldevi (who may or may not be an aspect of Kali) in the village of Seenigama near Hikkaduwa on the West Coast. The temple is a popular site for black magic. It is believed that Devoldevi is particularly effective as a medium for curses. The curser approaches the *kapurā/ a* (religious officiant), who then crushes limes and chilli in a pestle and mutters an (unclear) chant under his breath. He then instructs the curser that “something bad” will happen to their target within one month or two months of the spell being cast. The curser must maintain a small shrine to Devoldevi at their home, and they are often instructed to return to the Seenigama temple one or two times (a trip often made at great expense) to maintain the curse.^{cxxxv} The important thing here is that the chilli and lime constitute a symbolic sacrifice for the deity. Animal sacrifice is replaced with the sacrifice of the lime and the chilli — just as animal sacrifice is considered a violent activity, limes and chilli are considered violent or angry (or violence- or anger-inducing) vegetables; so, they are considered sufficient to satiate Devoldevi’s blood lust.

In general, then, high ranking or respected deities are offered vegetarian food and only lowly demons are offered meat. Meat consumption is considered violent and, therefore, a low activity. But, as we might now expect, this is a complicated and not always uniform practice. To begin with, what is considered a respectable deity depends on shifting cultural factors. Devoldevi is a malicious deity who brings curses on people, but she nonetheless receives vegetarian food (even if she might prefer the flesh of an animal). Kataragama, a highly respected deity (the Sinhala version of Skanda), who is widely worshipped by Sinhala Buddhists, receives plates of fruit as a sacrifice (i.e. vegetarian fare); but, in principle, according to Gombrich & Obeyesekere, he could receive flesh. They say that Kataragama is “ritually offered venison, and at one time, it is said, [he] was even given iguana meat” (1988, p. 175). This is, of course, inconsistent with the notion that only respected deities are offered vegetarian food and that only marginal deities offered meat. But this seems to be because of yet another pole on this axis: malevolence. Like Devoldevi, Kataragama is considered a malevolent and wrathful deity, and Sinhala Buddhists often go to him for blessings (Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988). Respected but malevolent deities may want flesh foods, and devotees may sometimes supply them — even though it goes against their conventional practices. However, it could be that such an offering is more efficacious: they wish to stand out from the “hoi polloi”. We can see then, that, as with our general observations throughout this thesis, a tension exists between a desire to act in a non-violent way and an attraction to participate in violent activities because of prevailing desires. In this case, the desire is to attract a blessing from a powerful and efficacious god, Kataragama.

So far, I have only made reference to meats and vegetarian food. But I must consider yet one more dimension to this arrangement. Lowly beings, such as the demons described by Kapferfer, may be given meat. But they are also sometimes given other foods that may be considered lowly. For example, *prētas* (introduced in the discussion concerning the *Carpenter Prēta* — so-called “hungry ghosts”) are commonly thought to be attracted to sweetmeats and deep-fried snack foods. Consequently, those who eat sweetmeats (such as honey cakes, *kaum*, *mung kaum*, etc.) after dusk are not allowed to walk around by themselves, because it is thought that they might be harassed by *prētas* (they are considered largely harmless, but are known to frighten people).

Sweetmeats are considered desserts and, therefore, as potentially unhealthy. They are only eaten sometimes or on special occasions. But they are, as in the Western case of desserts, considered objects of desire. *Prētas* are understood as creatures that have been reborn in the state they are precisely because of uncontrolled desires. Sweetmeats, through their association with *prētas*, are, therefore, often associated with uncontrolled desires. A similar case can be made for the interest that demons have in flesh: it is through the demon’s insatiable appetite, its craving for violence, that it is attracted to flesh. The greed attached to *prētas*, and the violence attached to the demons, are considered evil attributes from a Buddhist perspective. Therefore, we can see that, in principle, a craving for flesh (or a craving

for sweetmeats) is potentially a sign of a degenerate individual. It is also worth recalling *The Carpenter Prēta's Tale* in light of these considerations.

V – Conclusions

Sinhala Buddhism is a particular brand of Theravāda Buddhism. It is the tradition of Theravāda Buddhism as lived out in Sri Lanka. Sinhala Buddhism is a unique sort of Buddhism informed by certain facts about Sinhala culture and history. For our purposes, I focus only on the specific issue of diet and food practices, and the manner in which Buddhism and the principle of non-violence has impacted on diet and food practices. Sometimes, I also consider wider secular and non-secular beliefs — not just Buddhism. This is necessary, partly because these other beliefs influence, or even constitute, Sinhala Buddhism (not just Theravāda Buddhism qua Theravāda Buddhism) to some extent. This is, in some respects, what makes Sinhala Buddhism the unique entity that it is, something that we can consider apart from other types of Theravāda Buddhism, and certainly something that is apart from the literary form of Theravāda Buddhism. This literary form is something that I investigate more fully in Chapters 1 - 3.

I have endeavoured in this chapter to show that the issue of proper diet, in particular pro-attitudes to vegetarianism, and the attitudes people hold towards animals and non-violence towards animals, are produced in multiple ways. Multiple interests are at stake here: sometimes pro-attitudes towards animals and vegetarianism are produced via purely religious considerations, such as deep belief in the importance of compassion and altruistic love. We see, after all, that pro-attitudes towards animal non-violence, and even vegetarianism, have been evident in Sinhala Buddhist history from the earliest times, and that it is easiest to explain the phenomenon out of religious sentiment. This seems particularly plausible in light of the textual findings I consider in the first three chapters.

Sometimes these beliefs are produced by political considerations, unconscious or otherwise. It seems that, at times, the image of the non-violent Sinhala Buddhist — who would not even harm a tiny insect — helps to solidify idealised cultural identities and provide a contrast against other non-Sinhala peoples. The genesis of this image is evident in the attitudes that Buddhists have towards King Aśoka, who is thought of as a great protector of animals. In some respects, Sinhala Buddhists may have internalised this non-violent attitude towards animals as a distinctly Buddhist attitude, something that sets them apart from other religions and cultures.

The creation of this non-violent Sinhala identity is evident elsewhere. The anti-meat discourses apparent in *The Carpenter Prēta Tale* and in the writings and oratory of Dhammapala are precise examples of an attempt to draw a line between Christian aggressors and the Buddhist oppressed. Such discourses stake a claim that the Buddhist is better, holier, and more compassionate; the Christian: violent, a barbarian overcome by

bloodlust. This type of polemic is also evident in the modern-day usage of the *Mahāvamsa*, in which the Sinhala Buddhist is construed as a reluctant hero: reluctant to the degree that Duṭṭhagāmaṇī is aware of the evils involved in violent action, but a hero insofar as he is nonetheless able to carry out such actions for the greater good. This reluctance to perpetrate violence, but the understanding that it is also sometimes necessary, is considered a feature of the Sinhala people and a way of distinguishing them from the Tamils. The image of the non-violent (or, at least, reluctantly violent) Sinhala Buddhist, who shuns meat whenever possible, is a fantasy of sorts; but it also explains, to some extent, the seemingly confusing situation whereby Sinhala Buddhists both endorse vegetarianism and also fail to practise it. This peculiar tension becomes increasingly apparent in the next chapter. I encourage the reader to keep in mind some of the explanations for this tension that I have considered in this chapter.

Also important to keep in mind is the fact that Sinhala Buddhism is influenced in many ways by mainland Indian culture, in particular Hindu culture. I suggest that a number of parallels exist (and also some dissimilarities) between the case of India and Sri Lanka when it comes to food practices, non-violence to animals and vegetarianism. Here, I continue to explore these links. In particular, in the final chapter, I consider a cow protection society in Colombo, and consider it in contrast to some of the facts that I examine concerning cow protectionism in India. As I suggest, multiple explanations often account for the existence of such a phenomenon.

In this chapter I have illustrated two competing themes symbolised through the valorisation of the cow and the lion. These two animals in some ways represent the passive and the violent side of Sinhala culture respectively. In general, this represents the tension between violence and non-violence in Sinhala Buddhist culture. These tensions can be unpacked in the following way: on the one hand, according to this imagery, the Sinhala people construe themselves as lions. They are proud of their martial heritage and of their battlefield prowess. This is most evident in the nationalism attached to the more recent Eelam wars. On the other hand, the Sinhala people romanticise the pacifism and non-violence of the Buddha. This is evident in the Buddha's claim that one should treat a cow as one's own mother and thus should never harm them. This is taken seriously by Sinhala Buddhists: thus, animal cruelty is considered a great vice.

^{civ} Jha and Alsdorf both also observe that Aśoka set limits on animal hunting (1967, p. 67; 2010, p. 53).

^{cv} Stanley Tambiah intimates at various points that Aśoka has been, and continues to be, influential in the Sinhala imaginary, in particular in the sphere of politics. For example, some political groups identify with Aśokan policies (1992, p. 106) and it is a celebrated fact that

King Devānaṃpiyatissa was patronised by Aśoka (1992, p. 133). In fact, according to K. M. de Silva, Aśoka was responsible for sending the missionary Mahinda to Sri Lanka to begin with (2005, p. 12). Aśoka is, therefore, celebrated as the progenitor of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, and is venerated in that respect.

^{cvi} Alsdorf writes: “In his inscriptions the emperor attests more than once that he was a pious Buddhist; in the Small Rock Edict, he even relates his conversion and his initially very modest, but, later, growing religious zeal. Apart from these personal avowals, however, in all the edicts intended for the people [...] anything specifically Buddhist is missing; neither is the name of the Buddha found nor does a single one of the essentially Buddhist terms and items of doctrine appear.” (2010, p. 55)

^{cvii} Jha notes that Gandhi held cows in very high regard comparing them to one’s mother (2002, p. 17). This will be discussed again in Chapter 6. Furthermore, in his autobiography Gandhi writes that, “My ideas about cow protection had been definitely formed then [during his dealings with his Malwadi friends], and my conception of the work was the same as it is today. Cow protection, in my opinion, included cattle-breeding, improvement of the stock, humane treatment of bullocks, formation of model dairies, etc” (1993, p.426).

^{cviii} This magico-transformative process continues today both in India and, importantly for this study, in Sri Lanka. At the Kataragama *dewalaya* mentioned earlier, the subject of the sacrifice is consumed, though, in this case, the contents are vegetarian. A basket of fruit is offered at the Kataragama shrine (Kataragama is the Sinhalesed version of the God Skanda). Once blessed by the *kapurāḥ* (the title of the religious officiate), the basket is then returned to the devotees, whereupon it is consumed and given to wild animals in the area (typically monkeys). There is a clear connection, then, between sacrifice and consumption. There is also a connection here between vegetarian food and Hindu sacrifice in Sri Lanka. I consider this later on.

^{cix} Jha disagrees with Crooke here. Crooke maintains that the Vedas and Brahmanas are pro-cow and that this is the source of the image of the sacred cow (1912, p. 280). It seems likely that Crooke is simply mistaken here, as Jha and Alsdorf both demonstrate.

^{cx} “Epidemic diseases, for example, are often countered by sacrificing animals to appease the goddesses; but at a few temples like Kali’s famous Kalighat temple in Calcutta, animals are slaughtered daily to please her.” (Fuller 2004, p. 45)

^{cx} In his autobiography, Gandhi writes: “My ideas about cow protection had been definitely formed then [during his dealings with his Malwadi friends], and my conception of the work was the same as it is today. Cow protection, in my opinion, included cattle-breeding, improvement of the stock, humane treatment of bullocks, formation of model dairies, etc.” (1993, p. 426)

^{cxii} The food of very low castes — such as meat — is regarded as contaminating, and, therefore, special decontamination rituals must be enacted (Orenstein, p. 6).

^{cxiii} Though Khare does observe that vegetarian policies are still maintained to some extent, because cutlery used with meat dishes is kept separate from cutlery used with vegetables (1966, p. 238). This shows that vegetarianism is still regarded as religiously significant and cannot be completely overridden.

^{cxiv} According to K. M. de Silva, the *Mahāvamsa* contains a lot of historical material that has been confirmed as historically accurate (2005, p. 78).

^{cxv} In this regard, the *Mahāvamsa* can be viewed as an orientalist treatise in the same way that many other histories are orientalist: it denies a local history prior to colonisation. A good example of this is the way Australian history is commonly conceived — prior to British settlement, Australia had no history, even though Aborigines had settled there thousands of years prior. This shows that, as Edward Said himself noted, although the text is oriental, this does not mean that it cannot be orientalist.

^{cxvi} The text even disapproves of the hunt explicitly: “It is not proper,” Mahinda instructs the king (in the form of deer no less), “to shoot an animal while it is inattentive” (MV, p. 167). This is, however, not so much a denouncement of hunting per se, but an endorsement of fair chase principles: if hunting is to be done, it is to be done fairly.

^{cxvii} This is consistent with the *Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta* (see: DN 26, p. 385).

^{cxviii} The entire fable is from Gombrich (1991, p. 336). He tells the story in greater detail.

^{cxix} Tambiah (via Gunasekere) places the composition of the text in the 18th century. It is clear that the text cannot be regarded as a genuine historical document, but is rather a part of Sinhala myth. I indicate later that this text, along with the *Mahāvamsa*, is a tool for the construction of a Sinhala identity.

^{cxx} This passage also indicates how important horoscopes (*kendara*) are in Sinhala culture. Gombrich & Obeyesekere discuss the role of astrology in modern Sinhala culture in great detail in their own work (1988).

^{cxxi} Another point about this story is how seemingly irreligious it is. Recall (see Chapter 1) that the Vinaya rejects bestiality. Also recall, however, that the bestiality is rejected only because it presupposes the existence of dangerous cravings. Consequently, the practice is banned for monks, but not laypeople — and, therefore, not princesses. For the latter, it is only inadvisable; it is not otherwise a violation of monastic law.

^{cxxii} Just one example: Chris Clarke recounts that, in the Pāli *Apadāna*, a man constructs a footstall and lion throne for the Buddha (2011, p. 24).

^{cxxiii} I establish in an earlier chapter that animal flesh was often used as a curative in earlier times (and this idea still persists, as I discovered through the ethnographic research).

^{cxxiv} When and how Locke got access to the book is subject to some guesswork (see *Two Treatises of Government*, 1988, pp. 55-56). Locke discusses Knox's book in section 92-93 of book II (*ibid*, pp. 327-328).

^{cxxv} Although Olcott was fundamental in Buddhist revivalism in Sri Lanka, he ultimately came into conflict with Sinhala Buddhist traditionalists because of his deviant views. To note just one example, Gombrich observes: "Olcott claimed that the tooth relic in Kandy was an animal bone." (1988, p. 206) This is, needless to say, completely unacceptable to Sinhala Buddhist orthodoxy, and is essentially blasphemous.

^{cxxvi} It is important to acknowledge that Prothero's article is primarily a critical appraisal of the notion that Sinhala Buddhism has a protestant side to it, but it is not the place of this thesis to consider the virtues of this label. For my part, I tend to accept Gombrich & Obeyesekere's argument.

^{cxxvii} This observation is also made by at least two commentators on Dhammapala (Prothero 1995, p. 297; Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988, p. 214).

^{cxxviii} For a modern take on this tension between violence and non-violence in the Sinhala Buddhist clergy see Daniel Kent's article on Buddhist ministry work in Sri Lanka during the war (2010, pp. 157-178). For a look at Buddhist monks that err more on the side of pro-violence see Tambiah's study (1995).

^{cxxix} This is consistent with the tone of the *Vinaya*, which states that animal killing is significantly less evil than the killing of human beings. As stated earlier, this indicates that there is a break between the *sutta* literature and the *Vinaya* insofar as the *sutta* literature regards all killing as equally deplorable, while the *Vinaya* is far more casual about animal killing.

^{cxxx} Simoons originally wrote this in 1961. I would dispute the commonness of beef eating in Sri Lanka. Due to cow protection campaigns (to be discussed later) beef consumption is now quite unpopular. Beef consumption was probably more popular in the mid 20th ce due to the influence of the British.

^{cxxxi} Southwold also observes that, even though the principle of non-violence is highly prized, Sinhala Buddhists still kill when necessary such as when a dangerous snake is nearby (1983, p. 67).

^{xxxii} Although, it may be observed that this contradicts his statement made with Gombrich. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that the former statement was made in 1988, while the latter was made in 1963. This implies that Obeyesekere changed his mind and revoked his idea that the precept is relevant. I prefer to agree with Obeyesekere's former position, however.

^{xxxiii} Both Kapferer and Feddema provide much more sophisticated and detailed explanations for this substitution process and I direct the reader to their work for details.

^{xxxiv} See Gombrich & Obeyesekere (1988, p. 140). I suggest that, given the timing of the ban, the outlawing of animal slaughter further reinforces the Sinhala view that they are intrinsically non-violent, unlike the Tamils who, as Hindus, inherently favour animal slaughter. In this way, the law may be considered another example of racial politics. However, this view cannot be confirmed without consulting the original documents (and even then it may not be clear).

^{xxxv} These observations are based upon a field trip undertaken by the author in June, 2007.

CHAPTER 5 | VEGETARIANISM AND THE *BUDDHA-PŪJĀ* IN URBAN SRI LANKA

In Chapter 4, I establish a historical and social precedent for vegetarianism in Sinhala Buddhist Sri Lanka. This is not, however, simply a historical anomaly — pro-attitudes to vegetarianism persist in contemporary times, too.

This chapter investigates the pro-attitudes lay people demonstrate towards vegetarianism. These pro-attitudes are demonstrated in part by lay *buddha-pūjā* activities: many lay people, both vegetarian and meat eating, offer only vegetarian food at *buddha-pūjā* ceremonies. Some also offer vegetarian food exclusively at *dānē* ceremonies, though this is much less common. In general, we will see that lay informants maintain a positive attitude towards vegetarianism and believe it to be a natural extension of the first precept. This finding contradicts some of the ethnographic observations made in Chapter 4. Only a few lay people are ambivalent towards vegetarianism, and only one layperson is actively against it. This result differs markedly from the attitudes expressed by the clergy who, for the most part, are mostly ambivalent towards vegetarianism. I discuss these matters more fully in Chapter 6.

This chapter follows the following structure: In Part 1, I consider a piece of written literature produced by a lay writer called Sriya Rathnakāra. The piece is interesting in its own right, but it also foreshadows comments made by some of the lay informants. In Part 2, I supply a detailed analysis of the attitudes our informants held towards vegetarianism at the time of the research. Finally, in Part 3, I examine the role of the *buddha-pūjā* and argue that views associated with how Buddha images should be treated during *pūjā* ceremonies shows an implicit pro-attitude to vegetarianism. An important part of this analysis involves reference the *muruthan pūjā* at the Sri Daladā Māligāva.

Note that, even though this chapter is mainly concerned with the lay view, I do, at times, consider some of the views held by monks — but only when it becomes relevant in highlighting or explaining lay practices. For example, in understanding the Māligāva *dānē* and *muruthan pūjā*, it was necessary to discuss the issue with a presiding monastic authority at the Māligāva. I include his comments on this matter here rather than in Chapter 6.

(a) Pro-vegetarian polemics: *Give us space to live*

Before we turn to the interview data proper, I begin by examining a pro-vegetarian text written by a layperson called Shriyā Rathnakāra. Rathnakāra's book is called *Give us Space to Live* (*apita jīvath venna ida denna*), and it represents a passionate attempt to articulate a pro-animal, pro-vegetarian view that is rooted in a Buddhist perspective.

I have chosen to discuss his book at the outset for three reasons: First, it provides an extreme example of Sinhala Buddhist animal protectionism, and thus gives us an idea of how to measure and contrast some of the attitudes of the forthcoming interviewees, particularly those who are animal protectionists themselves. Second, the Rathnakāra text represents an unusual case in the context of the rest of the data, in that it expresses a view about Buddhism and animals that comes from a piece of text rather than from an audio interview. Third, Rathnakāra is a layperson and is, therefore, best suited to this chapter and the issues I consider herein. For similar reasons, I begin Chapter 6 with the examination of a text written by a monk who is, himself, not in favour of ethical vegetarianism from a Buddhist angle. These two texts help contextualise the discussions in these two chapters. In particular, they also further reinforce a tendency within both the lay and monastic camps that I will continue to develop throughout the remainder of the thesis: the lay camp seems to, in general, favour ethical vegetarianism, while the monastic camp has a tendency towards rejecting ethical vegetarianism. I examine some reasons why this split may have occurred at the end of Chapter 6.

Rathnakāra's book is called *Give us Space to Live* — in keeping with this provocative title, we find that the text itself is polemic in character. The book is principally concerned with trying to persuade people to treat animals better, and in the course of this, recommends vegetarianism. The character of the book is also apparent from the cover. The cover has three images: the first depicts a monk looking at a cow bent over in an awkward position and in obvious pain; the second image is of a man riding a motorcycle with a stack of (what appears to be) dead dogs tethered to the back rack; the third and final image is, again, a small (seemingly dead) cow or buffalo tied up on the back of a motorcycle (see Image. 7, p. 338). It is telling that two of the three images are of dead or distressed cattle. I further consider why cow protectionism is particularly important in Chapter 6. Rathnakāra features again in that Chapter. Nonetheless, this cover does provide the reader some idea about the content of the book: it is, in some ways, a confrontational text that attempts to broach a controversial topic. Let us begin, then, by considering the polemical tone.

i) Polemical tendencies

One characteristic of *Give us Space to Live* is the author's tendency to speak to the reader directly. In doing so, Rathnakāra often chastises the reader for his or her assumed immoral behaviour. He asks, for example: "How many innocent animal lives do you sacrifice for the wedding feast, for the birthday entertainment, to make your conversation {tasty}?"^{CXXXVI} And then: "Isn't it the case that you cut pieces of meat from animal bodies [so that your] own

mother, father, brother and sister may exist with happiness.”^{Cxxxvii} These accusations reach a crescendo in passages like this:

Cows have gone from place to place. Goats, pigs, and chickens are sorted, priced, lorries take them to cattle sheds, they are imprisoned without food in cages, and they go on a journey of many miles knowing that at the end they will be executed.^{Cxxxviii}

These emotive appeals are consistent with the polemical material already encountered. Recall, for example, the conflict between the Jains and the Buddhists as discussed in Chapter 3. I mention there that the Jain texts have historically provided a space in which the perceived hypocrisy of Buddhist non-compliance to vegetarian norms can be aired. Things are reversed in *Give us Space to Live* because we find that it is the Buddhists who are engaged in aggressive pro-vegetarian polemics. This aggressive pro-attitude, however, is something of an outlier. Gñānanda Thera, who I will discuss in Chapter 6, takes a completely opposite view arguing that ethical vegetarianism is not supported by Buddhism. Gñānanda Thera, unlike Rathnakāra, does not employ polemic. We should not think that this mode of engagement is common among vegetarians either — none of the vegetarian informants were as polemically inclined as Rathnakāra.

ii. Buddhist tendencies

For Rathnakāra, the immorality of animal slaughter and the necessity of vegetarianism is, to a large extent, predicated on Buddhist principles. For example, he writes that:

The Buddha *dhmma* endorses opposition to the food of meat and fish [as these foods] are without truth. But if you wish (*prārṭ anā karanne*)^{Cxxxix} that all animals be happy, if you promise to embrace the verses for life, [then you will abstain from animal flesh].^{Cxl}

For Rathnakāra, vegetarianism follows from the Buddha's teaching directly, and, in particular, from the verses for life — i.e. the vow to abstain from violence to all living beings (the first precept). As outlined in Chapter 1, this precept is critical to how Buddhists view the treatment of animals. Here, Rathnakāra makes an explicit connection between this precept and what constitutes a proper ethical diet. This connection between the first precept and vegetarianism

is similarly made by a sizable number of our informants. In Chapter 6, however, we see that the clergy do not make this connection and that they do, in fact, often explicitly deny it.

The first precept is critical in Rathnakāra's general approach to vegetarianism and Buddhism. Rathnakāra quotes the Pāli verses in full: "*pāṇāthipāthā veramaṇi shikbāpadan samādiymi*," (2009, p. 2)^{cxli} which is the first of the five precepts and a vow taken regularly by devoted (or even lax) Buddhists. In English, it reads: "I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from the destruction of life." Rathnakāra takes this precept to extend to all beings everywhere:

To every single life do not inflict even one injury. If one word is uttered [it is] 'non-violence'. The pure Buddhist religion quickly spread this most noble word of non-violence. From that day the Buddha *dhmma* preached that it is not human births, it is every life. [The Buddha *dhmma*] views every innocent sprout as an appropriate existence [in which this idea of non-violence can be applied to].^{cxlii}

Here we find Rathnakāra viewing non-violence in terms of the *Mettā Sutta*, which endorses the idea that all creatures everywhere — small or large, weak or strong, and so on — should be happy and at ease. Rathnakāra quote a Pāli passage from the *sutta* to this effect, and then goes on to provide a synopsis of "the meaning" of these passages (p. 4, second paragraph, 2009). According to Rathnakāra, the passage extends to all creatures, even the "microscopic" (*siyumi*) ones. This is interesting because in Western animal ethics, microscopic beings are generally thought to be devoid of sentiency and therefore morally irrelevant. Not so for Rathnakāra. For him, even bacteria and viruses should be thought of compassionately. Clearly, his project is extreme in its ambition.

If one takes the *Mettā Sutta* seriously, then one would, Rathnakāra thinks, become a vegetarian. He is incredulous that so-called Buddhists would be aware of the *Mettā Sutta*, listen to it, and yet engage in activities involving the butchering and preparation of animal flesh for meals: "Temples receive the duty of singing the *Mettā Sutta* [but] inside the kitchen [of the temple] folk take a knife in their hand and cut slices of chicken flesh [and then] take them outside in refrigerators."^{cxliii} Rathnakāra thinks that these actions are hypocritical: outside, monks perform a *sutta* on non-violence, but inside the temple kitchen, laypeople are preparing the flesh of animals to be eaten for a *dānē*.^{cxliv}

The outrage is not just reserved for chickens: Rathnakāra also singles out the preparation of "fish, sprats, prawns or Maldiv fish" (*karavala, hālmāssō, isso* or *kunisso ya*) (ibid). This is noteworthy because, although many Sinhala Buddhists might accept that chickens should not be harmed, it may not be obvious that fish are also morally relevant. The

fact that Rathnakāra believes that people should abstain from Maldivian fish is particularly interesting given the pervasiveness of Maldivian fish in Sinhala cuisine — it is dried, ground up and liberally used like a spice in most Sinhala dishes, and few people even think of it as an animal product. In the next few chapters, examples repeatedly arise of particularly devout vegetarians who are notable precisely because they also avoid Maldivian fish flakes.

Rathnakāra argues, too, that eating meat and fish is a violation of the first learner precept (which is the precept for abstention from violence), but “not the fundamental [or primary, or basic] verse that protects all animals.”^{cxliv} What he means here — I believe — is that he recognises that the verse merely encourages vegetarianism, but does not make it mandatory. After all, the verse itself only requires the protection of animals from violence; it says nothing about the consumption of animals or vegetarianism. The subtlety of the verse is, therefore, not lost upon Rathnakāra. Nonetheless, he believes that it is hypocritical and incoherent to endorse compassion towards animals while simultaneously eating them. In this respect, Rathnakāra does not necessarily take liberties with the texts. Rather, he tries to enforce an implied vegetarian norm in Buddhism.

iii. Health considerations

Apart from the fact that meat eating goes against the *dhamma*, the text also argues that the practice is decidedly unhealthy. Rathnakāra, therefore, employs prudential reasons, as well as moral reasons, for the non-eating of meat. He writes: “The more we keep feeding our bodies with poisonous meat and fish [the more] we will become victims of various diseases... It has been discovered that, through animals, through flesh, through birds, through eggs, 100,000 cancers happen.”^{cxlv} Animal flesh leads to the cultivation of diseases and, in particular, many types of cancer.

Not only can animal flesh lead to harmful physical ailments, it seems that these physical ailments also have other knock-on effects — such as madness. Rathnakāra writes:

... In the brains of animals — [their] ‘brain bag’ [in English] — a certain type of tiny insect occurs. This type of small poisonous insect has been propagated for an annual period of ten years. They [the animals] develop mental illnesses. These particular insects make them crazy. It has been discovered by doctors that these insects get lodged in the animal’s flesh and is [then] consumed by human beings [also] making them become crazy.^{cxlvi}

This preoccupation with health concerns is interesting, partly because the chief motivation to become a vegetarian among the clergy was due to health concerns. This was also a motivating factor for a few of the laity. Some were against vegetarianism on health grounds; others saw the advantage of vegetarianism in terms of its health benefits. On the whole, however, the laity was more preoccupied with the moral implications of vegetarianism, while the clergy did not view vegetarianism as being of ethical importance.

I. Attitudes Towards Vegetarianism^{cxlviii}

The Rathnakāra text represents a viewpoint on Buddhist Ethics that is shared amongst a significant number of the lay informants. This is not to say that the lay people express their views as forcefully as Rathnakāra. However, there is some overlap between the views expressed by Rathnakāra and with views expressed by at least some of the laity. The clergy, on the other hand, are a great deal more sceptical. Their general view can be summarised by the writings of Gñānanda Thera and his book *The Question of Vegetarianism*. I address this text in more detail the next chapter.

In this section, I divide my analysis into three parts. The first part deals with the accounts given by those who are vegetarians, while the second part concerns the non-vegetarian views. In the case of the vegetarians, we see that their reasons for becoming vegetarians are varied but Buddhism typically plays a very significant role. In most cases, the more religious an informant is, the more inclined they are to practise vegetarianism.

In the final part of this section, I consider the role of eating eggs and the attitudes informants have towards this dietary practice. The reason for treating this issue separately becomes apparent in the following discussion. The following section concerns giving meat to others in a more explicit way. In particular, I address the issue of giving meat and fish at the *buddha-pūjāva*, as well as the giving of meat and fish at *dānē* ceremonies. In all cases, it is apparent that vegetarianism is generally viewed as an ideal practice. Most importantly, this is even the case for non-vegetarians.

(a) Issues with Caste Affiliation

Before I begin to examine the views of the informants in detail, it is helpful to reflect upon the role of caste (*kula*). In India, caste heavily influences attitudes towards food. Brahmans, for example, are usually — though not always — vegetarian. This is, to some extent, because meat is considered impure and corrupting. Hence, for Brahmans (the highest caste), eating vegetarian food expresses the elite nature of their caste, and highlights their moral purity compared to other castes. Caste in Sri Lanka is also related to religious affiliation: people along the coast are often from the *karāva* fishing caste and are, at the same time, often

Catholics.^{cxlix} The relationship between food and caste in India is more detailed in Chapter 4 (p.139), however.

Although caste plays a role in Sri Lanka, caste organisation is different (and the impact that caste has on society at large is less significant) from in India. Generally, caste plays the largest role in matters such as occupation and marriageability. There is, of course, an element of moral purity at stake in respect to caste, but ritual pollution is not a significant factor in caste ordering, so food plays a very minor role in the Sinhala caste system — or, perhaps, no role at all (Gombrich 1991, p. 345). Consequently, and unlike in the case of India, different castes tend to interact a great deal more, and there is no real fear of contamination. As Gombrich conceives of the situation, little “social distance” exists between the castes (1991, p. 346). Ryan’s study of Sinhala caste is the most comprehensive, though his work is now dated (it was published in 1953). Nonetheless, much of what he claims still holds true. For example, Ryan observes that:

[...] the very mildness of the Sinhalese tabus leads many contemporary Ceylonese to view the system as crumbling and of little practical significance today. (1953, p. 17)

Yet, contrary these claims, caste still plays some role. According to Jeffrey Samuels, caste can affect social distance in some circumstances. For example, Samuels reports that a village he studied had trouble having its religious needs satisfied because village monks disliked associating with the villagers on account of their low caste (the *beravā* or drummer caste):

They [...] mentioned that the monks and *dāyakas* of the nearby Bodhigama temple prefer not to associate with such ‘small people’ (*poḍi minissu*), [a] euphemism that is sometimes used to refer to members of the service castes. (2007, p. 779)

Samuels tells a similar story in which another group of *beravā* people break from a local temple due to discrimination from the clergy because of their low caste (2007, p. 785). As Samuels himself notes, contrary to the popular view, caste still matters. Notice, however, that in the case of Samuel’s study, the reason for the monks not associating with the *beravā* people was not because of an issue of ritual pollution, but rather out of reputation, and possibly out of financial concern — a poor village provides an impoverished *dānē* (2007, pp. 781-2).^{cl} On this matter, Ryan observes that the Indian-Hindu vestigial organ of ritual pollution still only holds in the odd case of the *roḍiyā* caste.^{cli} In respect to food and caste, Ryan states: “Food is but slightly associated with caste; eating together holds the association.”

(1953, p. 158) Since none of the informants were of the *roḍiyā* caste, the issue of ritual pollution through food was not relevant.

Because the Sinhala caste system is largely unaffected by issues of ritual pollution through food, it is perhaps unsurprising that vegetarianism and caste are not affiliated. Both high-caste and low-caste informants tend to both approve of vegetarianism (see tables 4 and 5).

Table 4: Caste affiliation

Goyigama	Kārava	Unspecified low caste
13	1	4

Table 5: Preference by caste

	Pro vegetarian	Indifferent	Anti vegetarian
Go	7	4	2
Ka	1	0	0
Un	2	1	1

For example, Sumudu is of the *karāva* caste (fisherperson caste — which is low) but she also approved of vegetarianism. Renuka is high caste (*goyigama*) but was not enthusiastic about vegetarianism. Other high-caste informants such as Nawanga (also *goyigama*) were in favour of vegetarianism, however. Caste affiliation was not especially relevant then.

This is perhaps partly owed to the fact that (i) — as mentioned above — caste plays only a small role in day-to-day affairs in Sinhala communities; and (ii) the dominant caste in Sinhala society is the *goyigama* caste, which is a high caste. So, caste distribution is top heavy and uneven in Sinhala society (Gombrich 1991, p. 346). This latter observation is born out in our sample (13 out of the 19 informants were *goyigama*).

What seems more relevant than caste is the fact that of the informants were probably allied with so-called “Protestant Buddhism”. This ideas has been discussed in detail by Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988).^{clii} Protestant Buddhists view themselves as not being subservient to the monastic order in the way Lankans traditionally might have been. Nowadays, many people are openly critical of the monastery and believe that salvation can be achieved without the monastery as an intermediary. This has led to various “reform” movements in Sinhala Buddhism (described in detail by Gombrich and Obeyesekere, *ibid*). As Gombrich and Obeyesekere observe, certain key figures in Protestant Buddhism have endorsed vegetarianism, and it is possible that pro-attitudes among the laity may follow from

this. Protestantism in Buddhism continues to play an important role in the next chapter on monastic attitudes to vegetarianism.

Caste affiliation is more relevant in the monastic context to the degree that monastic *nikāya* are divided along caste lines. Most of the temples I visited were from the Siyam *nikāya* and were, therefore, high-caste temples. The Siyam *nikāya* only takes novices from the *goyigama* caste. All other castes must apply to the Amarapura and Rāmañña *nikāyas*. Most monks were skeptical of ethical vegetarianism, irrespective of caste. As I will argue, the reason for this is more likely because, of, (i) monastic emphasis on *Vinaya* regulations — regulations which allow meat eating — and (ii) possible monastic distrust of protestant Buddhist reform movements. The latter possibility is something that I only suspect, but it was not a subject studied in any great detail. It is an issue that does, I think, come through in Gombrich and Obeyesekere's study. In general, caste does not seem to be especially relevant, but if it were relevant this would need to be established through a dedicated study.

(b) View Point of Vegetarians

Chamika is the daughter of a three-wheel driver called Gayan. She is in her mid-to-late teens and attends school. Because of her father's occupation, her family is on the low end of the socio-economic spectrum. Chamika is a vegetarian, which seems to stem primarily from a sense of compassion for other living beings. When asked why she does not give meat offerings to the *buddha-pūjā* — more on this particular matter later (see p.195) — Chamika answered: “[I don't give meat because] this meat is another life, isn't it? To take another life so that you can satisfy your stomach is not deserving. Therefore, we do not offer it to the *buddha-pūjā* and we don't take it for sustenance (*ahārata*).” (Int — 6.1, 1a)

The idea that we must consider the life of other beings in our dealings seems to be distinctively Buddhist in character. In particular, it is suggestive of the principle of co-dependency — the idea that our actions depend on antecedent causes and have certain consequent effects.^{cliii} Eating meat depends upon something else: depriving an animal of life. Chamika argued that, while vegetarianism is not mandatory for a Buddhist, it is something that a Buddhist ought to practise voluntarily. She observed that:

The Buddha (*buddha-hānuduruva*) did not preach that we should only eat vegetables, but as individuals who follow the five precepts, Buddhists should know not to eat meat and to only take vegetables for sustenance (*ahāratayata*). (Int — 6.1, 15a)

Chamika's use of the word “sustenance” here is noteworthy. The word has technical implications insofar as, in Pāli (and also in Sinhala), the word has connotations of “fuel.” The

word can be compared with the more common Sinhala word for food, *kāma*. That she has chosen this word in describing what we should eat is relevant: food is a type of fuel, and we should not view it as being something to which we ascribe considerable desire. This idea that food should be viewed as a fuel was a notion repeated also by the clergy — especially the third monk from Temple A, who emphasised this point (see p. 235). Viewing food in this way is importantly Buddhist, because cultivating desires (*āśāva*) constitutes the very antithesis of good Buddhist practice (and this is as true in Sinhala Buddhism, as it is in the case of the wider textual tradition).^{cliv}

Charuni is also a vegetarian. She is the sister of Sanduni, whom I discuss presently. Charuni is in her early 40s and is involved in the organisation of Sanduni's household. Interestingly, Charuni employs both secular and Buddhist reasons for adopting a vegetarian position. To begin with, Charuni argued that the Buddha forbids the killing of animals, and, consequently, that meat should not be taken for *buddha-pūjāva* or for personal consumption. Charuni connected these practices to the five Buddhist precepts (*pañca-ṣīla*):

One of our [Buddhist] precepts is to 'refrain from killing animals.' [...] The Buddha, having told us this, [means that] it's not good for us to offer it to the Buddha [i.e. during a *buddha-pūjā* ceremony]. Truly...to say that we should refrain from killing animals [is to say] that we [should] reconcile (*sammadāna*) with that [non-killing] every single day. The harming of animals has been completely forbidden. (Int — 2.1, 1-5a)

According to Charuni, then, the fact that the Buddha forbids the killing of animals seems to imply that vegetarianism is consequently endorsed. But Charuni also had secular reasons for adopting vegetarianism. As in the case of many people in the West, Charuni was partly motivated to adopt vegetarianism after watching a video about animal slaughter: "I saw a video on the TV... after I saw it I thought 'I'm not going to eat it [i.e. meat and fish]... I'll never eat it [again].'" (Int — 2.1, 15a) Charuni in particular noted the harms that fish are exposed to. This is especially interesting, because Sinhala Buddhists commonly avoid meats such as beef, but eating fish is extremely common. Fish eating is very much a social norm in Sri Lanka. To this extent, the principal challenge to a Sinhala vegetarian is whether or not they are able to resist eating fish. Charuni noted:

The way they are killing animals... now the time it takes a fish to die, it suffers a lot before it dies, it dies after being in pain a long time. (ibid)

Charuni connected the eating of fish to the accruing of bad karma: “If we eat that, it says [the Buddhist scriptures, I assumed] that it will influence us after a period of time (*kālekaṭṭa*).” (Int – 2.1, 20a) Vegetarianism, therefore, has at least one prudential advantage: it is a way of avoiding the development of bad karma. In Sinhala, this word is *pav* and is commonly used in day-to-day conversation.

Perhaps the most important, and eminent, vegetarian we encountered was a middle-aged man called Nawanga. Nawanga can best be described as a devout Buddhist. He regularly attends the local temple (*pansala*), is engaged in organising temple activities, and also regularly practises meditation (*bāvannā*). He plays a critical role in household religious activities — I will describe some of these activities in detail later (pp. 197-199). In short, Nawanga is an *upāsaka*. An *upāsaka* is a very devout Buddhist, and is only one order away from monk ordination. A determined *upāsaka* often dresses only in white: the colour purity and lay devotionality (see Image. 3, p. 336).

In the case of Nawanga, he did not typically dress in this fashion, though he would make a point of doing so when visiting temples. Nawanga had previously spoken of his aspirations to join the *saṅgha* after his children all left home (two of his children are studying overseas, a third is finishing his school studies). His wife, Sumudu, was supportive of this idea. It could be observed that many Sinhala Buddhists do not look upon people who leave their family to join the *saṅgha* poorly. Having a member of the family in the *saṅgha* is generally considered a boon for the household, since it is regarded as a great source of *pin*. In general, Nawanga took Buddhism very seriously: his collection of books are mostly Buddhist, he does not touch alcohol, and he is also a vegetarian.

Although Nawanga practised vegetarianism, he did not believe that a Buddhist *should* be a vegetarian, or, rather, he did not think that it is mandatory for Buddhists to be vegetarians. In fact, Nawanga admitted that he sometimes had second thoughts about the virtues of vegetarianism:

Buddhists during the time of the Buddha... there were a lot of reports of that happening [i.e. Buddhists eating meat]. Even big Buddhists^{clv} accepted flesh at *dānē*. (Int - 1.1, 1c)

Because of this, Nawanga reflected: “Sometimes I think that refraining from meat is pointless,” (ibid) but he immediately points out that these historical disagreements are counteracted by the five precepts: “Despite this, as Buddhists, the first precept of the five precepts is, ‘Do not take life,’ (*pāṇātipatā*) [and this] means ‘Don’t take life from what has life.’” (ibid) Nawanga believed this to follow that directive fully requires universal

vegetarianism: “So in protecting that [directive], if everybody stopped eating flesh in that village, or in that province, butcheries [and] the killing of animals could disappear.” (ibid)

Nawanga even predicted that such a universal practice could cure worldwide animal killing:

Similarly, if everyone in the country, or everybody in the world, stopped eating flesh [then] the killing of animals would stop. If that were to happen that would be good. (Int – 1.1, 5c)

In saying this, Nawanga recalled a campaign in Sri Lanka where Buddhists were encouraged not to eat cows: “[For example], it was [at one time] advised that eating cows was bad and therefore a lot of Buddhists stopped eating cows (ibid).” The implication here is that this led to a decrease in cows being killed. A monk who ran *The Organisation for the Accumulation of Life* — which I discuss in Chapter 6, (see p. 253-259) — confirmed the existence of such a campaign running in the 1980s. In fact, he was running one just like it at the time of research. The basic argument of both campaigns was that it would be ungrateful to kill cows.

Among the laity, this campaign seems to have been quite significant. This is evident both in Sinhala literature — as we found with Rathnakāra’s *Give us space to live* — and in popular culture more generally. An example of cow protectionism in popular culture can be found in the song *Milk Mother (kiri ammā)*. The song is by Nihil Nelson, a celebrated baila musician.^{clvi} The song lyrics are^{clvii}:

Lyrics to Kiri Ammā

chorus

She gave her milk from her body
Perfect people grew from her power
Having done that goodness they are like empty people
Don't eat the meat of the milk mother

verse 1

Even the innocent cow has life
Why do you want to kill an animal prematurely?
Look and think a little bit - she eats clean grass
But you have been born a human yet you eat rotten flesh

If a person eats cow meat for 35 years
Multiply 35 by 365, the amount is 12,775
Do you realise the demerit you have done without looking into the future?

chorus repeat

verse 2

Some people greedily feed cows for money
After that the innocent animal's destiny is resolved
Having bought tasty meat with that money
The fact that it was the meat of the cow you sold, he doesn't know
Gee, buffalo curd, milk, the five products of the cow, are earned
Throw fertilizer to grow flourishing great vegetable gardens
People that do not eat meat from animals have a contented heart
Then many gods live throughout pure hearts

chorus repeats^{clviii}

A *kiri ammā* refers to one's paternal grandmother. The chorus compares the cow to one's own grandmother, and the cow is owed similar respect because, like one's grandmother, it nurtures us — the cow does this by supplying milk, cheese, curd, and other food. The first stanza has a Buddhist twist. There, the lyrics indicate that eating cows results in the acquisition of a great deal of demerit. In the final stanza, vegetarianism is recommended. I address the importance of cow protectionism and the nature and content of such arguments more in the next chapter when I look at the *Organisation for the Accumulation of Life* (pp. 253-259). Cows are an important feature of Sinhala Buddhist animal protectionism, and Nawanga highlights this fact. The above lyrics illustrate, however, that cow protectionism is not just the purview of serious minded Buddhist protestors – as a movement it has a much wider appeal.

But Nawanga believed that the aforementioned campaign for cows did not go far enough. He says, rhetorically: "Is it only a cow that has a life? ... [Even] if you look at small animals, every animal likes its life." (ibid) When asked if an anchovy and a cow have the same desire for life, Nawanga replied that:

Every animal likes its life (*paṇa āsā*). The desire is the same: like a caterpillar, like an ant... if you try to touch them they get scared because they're frightened of death. (Int — 1.1, 15c)

Nawanga then connected these thoughts back to Buddhism: “In the *suttas* of the Buddhist religion [it] teaches that all animals, not just four-legged ones, love their life (*jīvathā ādare*).” (Int — 1.1, 15c) In concluding the interview, Nawanga put the matter poetically:

Even if I am lying on my death bed, even if I know I am about to die, when I have completed my age^{clix}, and I know that my time for death is right, it's possible that I want to live for even another second longer... every animal is like that. (Int – 1.1, 20c)

The point of this discussion, then, is to show that all animals, including humans, are the same — they all have a desire for life. Nawanga made this point in order to illustrate why it is that we should be attentive to an animal's interests. By instigating universal non-violence in the form of vegetarianism — which he seemed to view as a kind of boycott of the animal slaughter industry — Nawanga believed that the Buddhist precept of non-killing can be fully realised. And although some Buddhists — even important historical Buddhists — did not adopt this practice, it is still the best way to be a Buddhist.

(c) Viewpoint of non-Vegetarians

In the previous section, I considered what vegetarians have to say about vegetarianism. Unsurprisingly, we discovered that they were in favour of vegetarianism. I also establish, interestingly, that a clear and conscious connection is made between the following of the first precept and the adoption of vegetarianism. This contradicts the observations made by numerous contemporary ethnographers mentioned in Chapter 4 (p. 159). There, it was noted that some ethnographers claim that Sinhala Buddhists typically do not assert that there is a connection between the first precept and vegetarianism. Although this claim seems to roughly hold for the clergy, it is a much more tenuous supposition in respect to the laity. As I will argue, even non-vegetarians seemed to view vegetarianism as a Buddhist ideal, and, in many cases, this was because of the first precept.

A good example of this is Roshani. Roshani is a lawyer. She is not a vegetarian, though she did mention that her sister is a vegetarian. Roshani stated that her sister is so diligent in her vegetarianism that she does not even eat dried Maldivian fish (*umbalakaḍa*). This is noteworthy because most Sinhala dishes incorporate Maldivian fish flakes as a core

ingredient. It is so prevalent that it is used just like a spice. The fact that her sister avoided fish flakes was, therefore, an indication both of her dedication to her diet, as well as her potential piety. The clergy also raise the notion that the most pious Buddhists do not eat Maldivian fish (see Chapter 6, p. 245); we also see a similar view expressed in Rathnakāra's text *Give us Space to Live* (see p. 176).

When Roshani was asked whether she thought that Buddhists should be vegetarians, she was uncertain about the degree to which it should be considered mandatory, but she nonetheless thought that it was a good practice to pursue if possible:

It's hard to say [whether a Buddhist should be a vegetarian], but it's good to be like that. That is to say, when we take the precepts, if we say '*paṇāthi pathā*' [the first precept], then we should live like that... That's the right way. Even I eat salted fish, but I don't eat meat. But it's best not to even eat that (*nokara innavai thamai hoṇḍa*). (Int — 3.1, 15a)

I note two important details: (i) Avoiding meat is less significant for many Sinhala Buddhists than the avoidance of eating fish. We see this in respect to the case of Charuni, but also in respect to the eating of — or avoidance of eating — Maldivian flakes, because fish is considered a staple part of the national diet. (ii) As in the case of the vegetarian Buddhists included in the study, and contra the prevailing ethnographic view stated above, it is clear from Roshani that the first precept has a direct bearing on whether or not vegetarianism should be adopted.

The importance of the first precept in driving people's attitudes towards animals, and how animals are used, arises again and again. A lecturer at a local polytechnic, named Rohini, insisted that meat should not be given at the *buddha-pūjā* precisely because of the first precept. She says that you should not give it because "it's bad to harm animals. [After all] there are the five precepts. [There is] a bad character in harming animals (*hoṇḍa nāthi kama*)."

(Int — 4.1, 1a)

Nonetheless, when pressed on whether vegetarianism is an activity that should be carried out by Buddhists, Rohini became more pluralistic: "That's [just] the desire of [different] people." (Int — 4.1, 5a)

In other words, it is a matter of personal preference. Her eldest son interrupted at this point to note that a decision to become a vegetarian or not "has nothing to do with religion." (Int — 4.1, 10a)

Nonetheless, her son did believe that there was a relationship between meat eating and the appearance of Maitreya Buddha.

In an earlier encounter, Nawanga the *upāsaka* insisted that, in the future era of Maitreya Buddha, everyone will be a vegetarian and no meat will be consumed. According to

Nawanga, the Buddha ate meat because of bad karma he had previously accrued. Maitreya Buddha would not be like that.^{clx} Rohini's son seemed to agree with this idea. He said (in English):

That is to say... now people's lifespans are shortening. And if that continues it will come to, like, ten years. Then people will start to think: 'Why has this happened to us?' So then they realise that we are doing these unwanted things [like meat eating], these bad things. Then they start to get rid of those actions, and then their minds, their thoughts, their hearts (*siṭṭa*)^{clxi} that will become good and good and good. Their lifetime get[s] expand[ed]. When it comes to, like, 80,000 years, then Maitreya Buddha will come to this world. And if we argue in that manner, we start to think in a good way. Then it is possible that people will stop eating meats and things. (Int — 4.1, 15a)

For Rohini's son (and perhaps for other devout Buddhists, such as Nawanga), vegetarianism was directly related to the reappearance of Buddhism in some future time.

Sanduni, Charuni's older sister, also agreed that the first precept indirectly leads to vegetarianism. Sanduni's family is very wealthy, primarily because her husband, Tilaka, runs an extremely successful auto-repair shop. The money they have is new money, however — both Sanduni and Tilaka come from relatively impoverished backgrounds. The family, along with Charuni, live in an opulent house. Their wealth is such that they can afford to send both their sons overseas to study, one in Australia, another in the United States. Sanduni was sympathetic to vegetarianism, though she herself is a non-vegetarian. She believed that Buddhists should be vegetarians:

I think that Buddhists say that the Buddha preached the view of non-violence (*ahimsavādayo*). Therefore it's not good to condone [the eating of meat and fish]. (Int — 2.2, 15a)

This is a clear connection between the first precept and the promotion of vegetarianism. Sanduni was aware that this raised questions as to why she herself — unlike her sister Charuni — was not a vegetarian. She answered this in the following way:

From a young age we are used to [eating meat and fish] and therefore we like it. Otherwise, meat and fish is something you receive when you have destroyed the life of

another being. Other people kill it because we eat it. Therefore I... we are used to it, right? [i.e., said rhetorically]. Because we're used to it, we desire to eat it. (Int — 2.2, 20a)

In saying this, Sanduni used a word of some Buddhist significance: *tanhā*. *Tanhā* is a feeling of intense desire or craving that leads us into suffering and ultimately into being trapped in the cycle of *saṃsāra*.^{clxii} Feeling *tanhā* is decidedly un-buddhistic, and Sanduni connected this feeling of desire to the eating of meat and fish. In short, like most people, she felt that she was caught up in a cycle of desire. Nonetheless, Sanduni did recognise that there are ways to curb this addiction:

Despite this, if we distance ourselves (*āthevenne*) as much as possible [from eating meat and fish] it is good. For example, today I would not eat meat or fish, so like that (*ē vage*) I don't feel like eating it. (Int — 2.2, 1b)

Weaning oneself off meat and fish is, therefore, a laborious activity. This explains why Sanduni had not accomplished being a vegetarian yet. She was clear, however, that in the event of a "*loku pūjā*" (a big *pūjāva*) she would not eat meat as an act of piety. Sanduni concluded in rather the same way that Nawanga did — by considering the fact that animals like their life just as much as human beings. This is an appeal to the Buddhist concept of compassion (*karuṇā*) and loving kindness (*mēṭṭa*). She said: "Just like I love my life, other animals value their life." (Int — 2.2, 10b) She added, though, that although she thinks in this way, she is still addicted to eating meat and fish.^{clxiii}

For Yasitha, another informant, the first precept also influenced his thoughts about vegetarianism. Yasitha is a schoolteacher, but he is also involved with teaching *Abhidhamma* at a Buddhist Sunday school. Consequently, he is very familiar with Buddhist theory. Although Yasitha was not a vegetarian, he reported that he often toyed with taking it up:

[I have an] idea to stop eating meat and fish. [I have this] idea to stop because we're eating the animal's flesh, right? We bring [back home] meat after we kill an animal. At this point we get caught up in the 'verse for life'. [...] The first precept [is] not to take the life of another creature (*paṇāthi pathā veramaṇī*). We try to refrain from breaking that precept but in a roundabout way we get caught in it by eating meat. (Int — 7.1, 15a)

Like Sanduni, Yasitha believed that vegetarianism is an ideal diet, even though many people (including himself) do not practise it. He says:

As a society (*sammājayak*) I'm not saying that all Buddhist should eat only vegetables. But if we try as hard as we can to refrain from eating meat and fish [then] that's the best thing. If we can refrain from it, [and] similarly if the people who live with us can refrain from it, and primarily if we ourselves [the individual person] can refrain from it... [then] that's a big [i.e. good] thing, I think. (Int — 7.1, 20a)

Again, Yasitha echoed the point made by Nawanga and Sanduni — that we ought to be more sympathetic to the animal's fundamental desire to live:

As Buddhists we accept that everybody wants (*āsāi*) to preserve their own life (*prāṇeyak*). There's no point in [just] talking about it [not eating meat fish], rather it has to be our heart (*hita*). (Int — 7.1, 1b)

That is, we must cultivate an appropriate feeling of sympathy and understanding for animals, and, in so doing, we can come to realise that we should give up eating meat because it leads to animals' harm.

Mrs Jayawardene also regarded the first precept as essential in determining whether vegetarianism was required. In particular, she noted that her husband — who was not present at the time of the interview — was a vegetarian and that his reason for his vegetarianism was owed to the first precept. Of her husband, Mrs Jayawardene said:

Because he only eats vegetables he doesn't even eat cakes. Cakes have eggs in them. This is... because of the first precept (*paṇṇatti paṭ ha*) [that is why] he doesn't eat meat or fish] — it's a life that we're eating... that's what he thinks. (Int — 7.3, 10a)

In spite of the fact that Mrs Jayawardene was herself a meat eater, she similarly believed that a vegetarian diet is ideal:

This is what I think — if you can be like that [a vegetarian] it's really great (*hoñdatama hoñdai*). If you can create a society that only eats vegetables, that's good. (Int – 7.3, 20a)

Mrs Jayawardene went on to argue that meat eating, in fact, runs against the Buddha's very message. She said: "The reason is because eating meat and fish contradicts the journey of the Buddha. Now, if we eat an anchovy, that's a life that was swimming (*pīnna pīnna*) around well, right? That's what we kill and eat." (Int — 7.3, 20a) For Mrs Jayawardene, the matter of what we eat was also directly related to the issue of rebirth. When we eat meat, after all, we might in fact be eating a family ancestor. The possibility of this occurring is morally problematic and has bearing on our conduct:

Sometimes the thing that we eat is the flesh of an animal, [but] we can think that if we go back to our past life (*pera bhavak*) when we travel between one life and the next (*athamayen athamayata yanakota*) the person that was an animal is one of our people, that we turn into meat that we eat... it is possible to think this. (Int – 7.3, 1b)

Another informant, Srilal, was also a meat eater. Srilal's occupation was not determined, but he seemed to have a respectable income. He is married and has a small child. Like Rohini and her son, Srilal made comments that suggested that vegetarianism was a matter of personal preference and was not in any way mandatory. When asked whether there is any good in being a vegetarian, Srilal replied in the following way: "That's their choice [i.e. the vegetarian's choice]. I'm not going to affect (*balapanuk*) them. Don't eat it [or] eat it." (Int — 7.4, 20a) This is similar to the relativistic comments made by Rohini and her son. This sort of relativism occasionally cropped up throughout the interviews (at least one of the Kēgalle informants made a similar claim). For Srilal, it doesn't bother him whether people are or are not vegetarians. There is no requirement to be one, and whether one is or isn't one is a matter of happenstance.

Nonetheless, in contrast to this seemingly indifferent attitude, Srilal subsequently suggested that vegetarianism was an ideal diet in keeping with Buddhist values and principles. When asked whether he thinks that Buddhist should be vegetarians, Srilal replied:

No. It's like this: not everyone can go down the path of the *dhamma*, can they? That is to say, on the day that the whole world becomes Buddhist is the day that we should stop eating meat. So in the life you live between now and that time [i.e. this Buddhist

utopia] we should reduce the amount [of meat eating] as much as possible. It's okay to eat nutritious food, that's what I think. (Int — 7.4, 20a)

A tension exists, then, in Srilal's account of vegetarianism. On the one hand, it is a Buddhist ideal; but, on the other hand, it is not something to worry about until a Buddhist utopia arises. Notably, these suggestions about a future Buddhist utopia are reminiscent of comments made by other informants, such as Rohini's son, concerning the coming of Maitreya Buddha and the beginning of the new *buddha-sāsana*.

Not all meat eaters connected the first precept to vegetarianism. Neither were they all sympathetic to vegetarianism. Consider the case of Renuka. Renuka is the mother of Nawanga. She is in her late 80s. She is the matriarch of the family and highly respected by everyone. Renuka is a devout and knowledgeable Buddhist, though it might be inappropriate to categorise her as an *upāsaka*. For example, she does not meditate often and she does not attend the temple as regularly as she would like to. Yet she takes Buddhism seriously and has studied the *Milindapañha* — an unusual intellectual commitment for many lay Buddhists, though perhaps not so unusual for monks).

On the topic of animal slaughter, Renuka was clear that killing animals is wrong. Consequently, she thought that meat should never be offered at a *buddha-pūjāva*. She said:

Buddha has said that harming animals (*satthu hiṃsa*) is not good. You don't need a single thing if your heart is pure. It's okay to even eat water and rice. Your heart is what needs to be good. (Int — 1.3, 1a)

The implication is that the more pious a person is, the less food they need in order to live. There are, of course, tales of renunciants who have perfected meditation to such a degree that they no longer need to eat or drink. Many Sinhala Buddhists are fascinated by the case of Ram Bahadur Bomjon, a young boy in India who supposedly used Buddhist meditation techniques, and, as a result, did not have to eat or drink.^{clxiv} During the fieldwork, Nawanga's older brother (not interviewed) proudly showed me a very large poster of the young boy.

In any case, although Renuka clearly recognised that the first precept protects animals from slaughter, she does not see that this as being connected to vegetarianism. When asked if she believes that Buddhists should be vegetarians, she replied by saying:

I don't encourage that. We don't go and kill it [i.e. animals]. We bought a thing that was for sale — is that sinful (*pav*)? [asked rhetorically]. Because of us, if we said, 'Somehow bring two fish from the sea,' we [would have] done wrong (*pav*) [in that case]. It was killed for us. (Int — 1.3, 20a)

As Gombrich points out, most butcheries in Sri Lanka are run by Muslims (1991, p. 304). For many Sinhala Buddhists, the arrangement suits them well, since the Muslims — who do not believe in the evil of killing animals — accrue the bad karma, while the Buddhists remain unharmed. The Sinhala Buddhists simply take what is already dead. As we have seen, however, not all Sinhala Buddhists agree that the buyer is faultless. Renuka took the view described by Gombrich — there is no moral problem with such a transaction.

Ānanda, a poor three-wheel driver, was also reticent about vegetarianism. His reasoning for this had nothing to do with morality, but was rather focused on the issue of health: "The blood in your body doesn't work properly (*ange le vaddanne nā*) when you only eat vegetables." (Int — 7.2, 10a) Of this fact he was somewhat uncertain, however, and he concluded the interview by enquiring sincerely: "The doctors tell you to eat [meat] too, right?" (ibid) It was apparent that he was unclear about where he ultimately stood on the issue.

(d) The Kēgalle Informants

The attitude towards vegetarianism among the Kēgalle informants was generally very positive. Three of the five informants did not give meat or fish at a *buddha-pūjā*. One said that she didn't give meat and fish at a *pūjā* because she was a vegetarian herself (Priyanka) (Int — 8.2, 1a); another said that he didn't give meat and fish because "the Buddha did not eat meat and fish, therefore we don't give it." (Buddhika) (Int — 8.5, 1a) Isuru, the son of Kān̄thi Aunty, stated that he gave meat and fish at a Buddha *pūjā* because the Buddha did not disallow it (Int — 8.1, 1a). Of all the informants, both in Kēgalle and Colombo, Isuru was perhaps the least sensitive to the virtues of vegetarianism. In fact, he even said [in English]: "We can get protein and other things from vegetables but we need meat." (Int — 8.1, 15a) Like Ānanda, he did not believe that vegetarianism was a legitimate medical or physical possibility.

Oddly, his mother, Kān̄thi Aunty, believed that vegetarianism was both an expression of the principle of non-violence and that it was also possible to live on vegetables alone: "You can get the same things from [vegetables] as from meat: *gotu kola*, you can get iron from *gotu kola*, spinach, *sāraṇa*, and other greens — you get energy from those." (Int 8.4, 10b) Nonetheless, she did seem to agree that it is sometimes necessary to consume meat for health reasons: when she was young, she was a vegetarian, but after she became sick, she was ordered by a doctor to eat meat and fish so as to regain her energy; since then, she has

resumed eating fish (Int — 8.4, 1b). Nonetheless, she was sensitive to vegetarianism and viewed it as a way to express the principle of non-violence:

The Buddha preached the view of non-violence. So, generally, people don't like to hurt animals [...]. Having the view of non-violence in your heart/mind, the heart/mind warms, [it thinks], 'Oh, it's an animal that gets hurt here!' — There is that sort of compassion (*anukampāva*). (Int — 8.4, 5b)

Nonetheless, Kān̄thi Aunty believed that giving meat and fish at a *buddha-pūjā* was acceptable, so long as the individual who gives has faith (*saddhāva*) in the Triple Gems — the Buddha, the *dhamma*, and the *saṅgha*.

Dayāni Aunty, the elder sister of Priyanka, was similarly concerned for the animal's wellbeing. She did not like to give meat and fish at the *buddha-pūjā* because "I feel sorry for it [the animal]. Because [the *pūjā*] is done from killing animals." (Int — 8.3, 1a) However, she did not believe that a Buddhist had to be a vegetarian:

It's okay for other people who follow Buddhism to do it, isn't it? [i.e. eat meat]. It's okay for people to eat it because they don't really take note of it. (Int — 8.3, 15a)

The most stringently pro-vegetarian informant was Buddhika, a carpenter who lived in the Kēgalle area. Not only did he not give meat and fish at a *Buddha-pūjā*, as I have already mentioned, he was also himself a vegetarian. He believed, furthermore, that Buddhists ought to be vegetarians and, moreover, that monks in general should not receive or be given meat and fish. He said:

As a long-time vegetarian (*nirmānsa kanna godak vellāva*), I think that [Buddhists should be vegetarian] and we are eating somebody else's flesh. That's what I think a lot. (Int — 8.5, 1b).

In this last section, I have begun to examine some of the views people had about supplying meat and fish at *pūjā* ceremonies. I expand upon this greatly in the next section, where I return again to the Colombo cases. As we can already see, people often did not like to give meat and fish at *buddha-pūjā* ceremonies, though there were a few notable exceptions. I

consider some of the motivations for why people do or do not supply meat and fish at a *buddha-pūjā* ceremony.

The Kēgalle sample, however, further confirms some facts already apparent from the Colombo study: the lay people have a generally positive attitude towards vegetarianism.

II – Giving Meat at the *buddha-pūjā* and *dānē*

The previous section considers what the Sinhala Buddhist informants thought about vegetarianism and the killing of animals. At least two important conclusions can already be drawn from this analysis: (i) vegetarians were largely motivated to adopt their diet for reasons related to morality (as opposed to, say health) and this motivation was itself universally Buddhist in character. In addition, we discover that most non-vegetarians regarded vegetarianism as an ideal diet, which they thought was properly in keeping with the Buddha's *dhamma*; (ii) the reason that both parties adopted this pro-attitude to vegetarianism was, in large part, explicitly attributed to the first Buddhist precept that prohibits the taking of life.

In this fashion, a clear connection is made between the killing of animals and the role that we play in purchasing meat. To this extent, customers are responsible for creating a demand. It may be said, therefore, that at least some of the Buddhists studied adopted the argument for vegetarianism that I examine in Chapter 3. Apart from this argument, informants also raised the importance of compassion (*karuṇā*). Some of the informants observed that animals like their life just as we do, and that we should appreciate this fact in our consideration of how we treat them: we should treat them as we would like to be treated, and this might involve not eating them. If this weren't enough to demonstrate strong pro-attitudes to vegetarianism, even further evidence exists relating to how informants practised their *buddha-pūjā* ceremonies. Very few of the informants ever gave meat during a *buddha-pūjā* ceremony. We can already see this in table 6:

Table 6: *pūjā* food practices

	Gave only vege	Gave only fish	Gave meat and fish
Colombo	11	1	1
Kēgalle	3	1	1

The common view was that only vegetarian food should be placed before the Buddha image. In the following, I suggest that this demonstrates that the laity tend to regard vegetarianism as an ideal diet, and, moreover, that vegetarianism is something to be expected of morally perfect beings. It is also interesting to compare this behaviour to the case

of *dānē* ceremonies. Laypeople, in these cases, are guided to a large extent by social expectation and the desires of the monastic community. That laypeople do not expect monks to be vegetarian, but that they assume that enlightened beings should be, is an interesting tension and perhaps speaks to the fact that lay people view monks as fallible.

(a) A description of *buddha-pūjā* activities

I first examine the practice of the *buddha-pūjā* more generally. In Sri Lanka, images and icons of the Buddha are common in every Buddhist's home. Most homes have at least one shrine where lay people can place flowers and, in particular, food in front of it as part of their daily devotional activities. These shrines are often quite small and simple, and are usually located in a common living space. I will describe the *buddha-pūjā* rituals by describing Nawanga's family's daily routine. In general, the description I provide constitutes a summary of the general relationship the family has towards the shrine, and therefore, in a sense, the relationship the family has to the Buddha. Nawanga's family can be regarded as an exemplar of Buddhist ritual customs. Other families discussed here will follow similar rituals, perhaps with less diligence. For example, the early morning ritual and evening ritual are usually elided. Nawanga's case is an exemplar case.

Early in the morning, just before he leaves for work, Nawanga performs a short *buddha-pūjāva*. This *pūjāva* involves the recitation of a short Pāli verse in front of the *buddha piḷ imaya* (Buddha statue). A verse conventionally uttered here is the three refuges (*thisa raṇa*): "I go to the Buddha as my refuge, I go to the *dharmma* as my refuge, I go to the *sarīgha* as my refuge" (*tatīyam'pi buddham saramam gacchāmi*, etc).^{cixv} Nawanga knows this verse by heart and he recites the verse with his eyes closed and with his hands pressed together above his head as if in prayer. In Sinhala the verb for such an action is *vandannava* - to worship or to show respect. Because the Buddha image is a sacred object, the hands are raised above the head, or near the forehead. The same posture is reserved for monks, *stūpas*, and other objects of religious veneration. Ordinary people are worshipped / respected with the hands placed together near the breast. Once he has recited the verse he keeps his hands together in worship above his head and bows slightly. The ritual is complete and he departs for his work.

The next *buddha-pūjāva* is conducted by Sumudu — Nawanga's wife — around mid-morning. By mid-morning Sumudu has finished preparing the day's food - lunch is the main meal of the day, for dinner lunch left-overs are eaten or alternatively a takeaway style food, such as hoppers (*āppa*) or string hoppers (*indi āppa*), are eaten. Sumudu takes the first, and best portion of food (to be discussed later, p. 212) and places them in small cups and saucers. Those items with the food in them are then placed on a tray are then carried to the shrine where they are carefully placed in front of the Buddha image as an offering. Sometimes a small saucer of flowers — usually white jasmine flowers (*samman piccha*) — are

offered too. Sumudu recites a short Pāli verse as Nawanga did. Again, the hands are placed above the head in an act of worship / respect. The character of the Pāli verse varies from case to case. Devout Buddhists such as Nawanga and Sumudu might recite a specific Pāli verse offering food to the Buddha. The verse begins with the usual acknowledgement of the Buddha's greatness — “for the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the Perfectly Enlightened One” (*bhagavato arahatho sammā sambuddhassa*) — and ends with a specific offering of food “this food I offer, offer, offer...” (*iminā āhārena pūjemi pūjemi pūjemi*). So concludes the second *buddha-pūjāva*, though for our purpose this *buddha-pūjāva* is significant in that it is the one that involves the offering of food items.

A third *buddha-pūjāva* is conducted in the evening around dusk. This is the *gilāmpasa* ceremony (to be discussed in detail below — p. 201). The *gilāmpasa* involves the offering of drinks and “medicines.” Again, Sumudu is responsible for this ceremony. It is interesting to note that perhaps the most important *buddha-pūjā* ceremonies, the ones where actual food is offered, are invariably conducted by the women of the household. This is partly a matter of convenience — women are almost always the ones responsible for preparing food. But there is also a more complicated theological reason — women need more *pin* because being a woman is often considered unlucky and womanhood is sometimes thought to have been caused by immoral activities in a previous life. For this reason women are often more pious than men, ostensibly because they hope to be reborn in a better state (i.e., as a man) in a future life. The idea that womanhood is an ontological burden was expressed to me in passing on several occasions during the fieldwork. As above, the *gilāmpasa* involves the recitation of a Pāli verse.

One final daily religious activity that is conducted in Nawanga's household is the reciting of *pirit* and the preparation of *pirit nūl*. The activity, however, seems very idiosyncratic and would surely be enacted only by the most pious Buddhist. Before bed, Nawanga sits on a chair with a family portrait (i.e. a photograph of the family) in front of him. He has in his left hand a spool of *pirit nūl* (sacred thread); in his right hand is a large book of Pāli verses. He then spends a long time, sometimes more than an hour, reciting Pāli verses in front of the image of the family, and in the presence of the spool of *pirit nūl*. A note on *pirit nūl*: During large assemblies at temples during *pirit* recitation, this thread is passed around to all worshippers so that everyone is ‘connected’ through a single piece of (sometimes quite long) thread. In this way the merit produced by the *pirit* that is recited is, as it were, carried through the thread; amplified by it. At the end of the ceremony the monk then ties the *pirit nūl* around the wrists of the attendants as a protection against bad luck (I was told the string is effective for no more than three days). This thread can also be prepared and used at home. Hence, Nawanga prepares the *pirit nūl* in his own home and then dispenses it to his family. That is, monks do not exclusively supply *pirit nūl*. By keeping his family in mind whilst he recites the *pirit* this somehow ‘targets’ the merit more effectively and therefore makes the *pirit nūl* more effective. The longer the *pirit* is recited, the more effective the protection is — hence why

Nawanga can spend hours reciting *pirit*. The length of the recitation is sometime proportional to the need for good fortune.

In the above, nearly all the religious activities centre around the Buddha image. Gombrich is at pains to point out, however, that the image itself is not sacred (unlike actual Buddhist relics). He writes: “The layman makes his or her way to the shrine and offers flowers or incense before a Buddha image and recites Pāli verses, as if in prayer, but it is all an exercise to purify one’s mind.” (2006, p. 125) As Gombrich says, the Buddhist ethic is one of intention. The reward one receives from delivering offerings to Buddha images is entirely derived from the “good thought” it involves. The actual offering has no special potency. (1991, p. 138) Notice that the importance of intention also explains why it is essential for Nawanga to have his family in mind when he is preparing the *pirit nūl*. As for the Buddha image, that image represents the Buddha and thus demands special veneration, but the Buddha is not a god. Gombrich remarks:

The Buddha has been treated as if he were a king and/or a super-monk. Whether he has been treated as alive in the statue is on the evidence so far still ambiguous. (1991, p. 162)

Elsewhere Gombrich says:

Especially in the Temple of the Buddha’s Tooth in Kandy, and to a lesser extent as one moves away from that essentially royal, paradigmatic institution, the Buddha image is treated like the King’s person. (2006, p. 145)

Gombrich does note that painted Buddha images are sometimes treated as “alive” after eyes are painted on them. (1991, p.1 62; 2006, p. 146) However, this only holds for temple images and not Buddha images kept at home. The latter are typically composed of fired clay or stone, and generally go unpainted. In general, it is best to view Buddha images and their shrines as a space in which good deeds can be occasioned through acts of devotion.

As described in the above account of Nawanga’s family’s practices, food offerings placed before the Buddha image occur once daily, usually in the morning and always before noon. Obeyesekere states: “In rituals in Buddhist temples, vegetarian foods and fruit juices are placed on his altar, and he is honored with incense and flowers.” (1963, p. 144) This is, of course true, but in addition — as I argue — this is as true of home ceremonies as it is of temple ceremonies. The fruit juices Obeyesekere mentions probably relate to the

aforementioned *gilāṃpasa* ceremony. This is distinct from the main *buddha-pūjā*, which is primarily concerned with offering food.

The *gilāṃpasa* ceremony, however, is concerned with “taking medicine” rather than food. It is a way of getting around the prohibition that monks may not eat a meal after noon (and, consequently, neither may a Buddha embodied, as he is, in the Buddha image).^{clxvi} There is a precedent for this idea in the *Vinaya*. For example, it is said:

What now if I should allow medicine for monks — whatever is medicine as well as what may be agreed upon as medicine — and although it may serve as nutriment for people yet could not be reckoned as substantial food? (Vin- MV, 4, p. 269)

Gombrich explains this as follows: “Around six in the evening monks consume a snack which is called ‘medicine,’ using the term from the canonical list of four requisites; this ‘medicine’ amounts to drinks and often also a little of some kind of food which requires no mastication.” (2006, p. 102) According to my informant Nawanga, the *gilāṃpasa* may include fruit juice, tea, *āyurvedic* medicines or sacred water (*paṇ*). It may not include milk (I was told that it is too “heavy”, bad for your health and that, in any case, monks do not drink it), or “strong” (*sāra*) drinks, such as fizzy drinks. Clearly, alcohol is completely inappropriate. Nawanga’s list is in general agreement with the *Vinaya*: only “health” drinks are allowed. It is useful to consider the etymological origin of the term *gilāṃpasa*: *gilinavā* means “to swallow” (Gunaratne 2003, p. 139). However, this word is usually associated only with swallowing medicines.

(b) Meat offerings at the *buddha-pujāva*

Obeyesekere’s observation that devotees tend to only supply vegetarian food at a *buddha-pujā* agrees with my own data. Most of the informants I interviewed refused to give meat as a food offering during their *buddha-pūjā* ceremonies.

The reason that this was the case was variable. Nawanga, the most devout Buddhist of all the informants, gave an odd answer when asked whether he gave meat to the Buddha image: “No. That is to say, as the head of the household, because I don’t eat meat or fish I think it is good to give the things I eat and drink to the *buddha-pūjā*.” (Int — 1.1, 1a) Yet, it is difficult to believe that his avoidance of giving meat and fish is completely unrelated to his devout belief that a good Buddhist does not take meat — and, therefore, that the Buddha should not take meat either.

Ānanda, the three-wheel driver, insisted that meat and fish should never be given, but his reasons were somewhat unusual. He claimed: “You don’t offer meat and fish, right? You don’t offer it to the Buddha. There are germs (*pīṭi*). You don’t offer it because of germs.” (Int — 7.2, 1a) This is an important point that relates to the argument I consider in Chapter 4 (see pp. 161-162) — that there is some cultural basis within Sinhala society to view meat as a low food due to its inherent impurity. A general understanding exists among Sinhala Buddhists that all dead things attract *pīṭi*, a term that corresponds roughly to the word “germs”. As I have already mentioned, only pure things should be given to a Buddha image. Since meat is contaminated by *pīṭi*, it is an inappropriate offering.

In any case, most informants who did not give meat or fish did so because they believed it to be a violation of the first precept. Some specific cases have been mentioned to this effect already. Renuka summed up the issue best when she said: “No. If you give the Buddha offering correctly, we shouldn’t offer it.” (Int — 1.3, 1a) Charuni also made the following interesting point:

The harming of animals has been completely forbidden. It being that way, it’s not right to offer it to the person who said it in the first place [i.e. the Buddha]. (Int - 2.1, 1a)

Srilal offered a more complex reason: “The Buddha doesn’t eat meat or fish and because it is not eaten [by him] we don’t offer it. There’s this thing where he unknowingly ate a piece of meat and he rejected it. Therefore we don’t offer it.” (Int — 7.4, 1a) This novel explanation is, to a large extent, at odds with canonical texts. Although a detailed account of the Buddha’s own diet was considered in Chapter 3 (pp. 111-115). Here, we will briefly consider what the lay informants had to say about it. Note that no monks disputed whether the Buddha ate meat — the laity’s knowledge of the Buddha’s meal was often incomplete, erroneous, or otherwise not in keeping with the texts.

Yasitha, the *Abhidhamma* teacher, explained that the Buddha did eat meat, but that it was an accident. He says:

There’s something like this: there’s no accurate recording of [the Buddha eating meat] that I’ve seen. One thing is a thing called *sūkara maddava*. It has been said that [the Buddha] had a stomach upset after it was consumed. That’s the only instance where we think he could have consumed meat and fish. (Int — 7.1, 10b)

In Chapter 3 the debate over whether the Buddha ate mushrooms or pork was discussed. Some lay people were aware of this debate. Yasitha, for example, said: “There was [also] an understanding that it [*sūkara maddava*] was a type of mushroom.” (ibid) He was not the only one who knew about this contested issue. Mrs Jayawardene, for example, stated that the debate has been settled and that it was determined that the Buddha never ate meat:

There’s nothing written to say that Buddha ate meat... It isn’t stated anywhere that meat was eaten [by him] [rather] mushrooms (*hathu*) were brought to [him]. There’s a place in the Buddha *dhmma* that says that mushrooms were received by him that it looked like meat. (Int — 7.3, 10b)

Mrs Jayawardene’s view was that *sūkara maddava* was a mushroom that merely looked like meat, and that this has led to confusion over whether the Buddha was a vegetarian. In her mind, he was.

The fact that few of the informants gave meat (again, see figure 3, p. 197) to their respective Buddha images seemed to be motivated in two ways. First, a motivation is derived from the belief that the Buddha did not eat meat. According to that belief, the Buddha was himself a vegetarian and, therefore, it is inappropriate to offer meat and fish to him. Whether the Buddha was or was not a vegetarian is irrelevant for our purposes here.

Second, there is the matter of the first precept: nearly all abstainers agreed that this directive was critical in their decision not to give meat and fish. The Buddha himself insisted that animals not be harmed, so offering him animal remnants seems to be a flagrant contradiction of that rule. It would seem, then, that there are certain expectations surrounding what should or should not be given to a Buddha image. There was a strong sense that giving meat and fish to a Buddha would be unacceptable, because such foods are impure and contradict the canonical teaching. A suggestion is implicit, then, that the Buddha either was, or should have been, a vegetarian due to his status as a perfect and supreme being. The fact that ordinary human beings — including monks — are not perfect is itself an important observation that perhaps allows for meat eating.

There are, of course, counter examples. Not all of the informants complied with the general rule that *buddha-pūjā* should be free of meat and fish. Both Sanduni and Yasitha gave meat and fish during their *buddha-pūjā* ceremonies. Sanduni explained:

Different people [have] different ways. Me... now in our house we cook meat and fish, therefore the thing I cook, the first portion of what I cook, because I have to serve the first portion of what I cook to the Buddha I serve it [for that reason]. (Int — 2.2, 10b)

This line of reasoning is of some interest. The custom in most Sinhala homes is that, at meal times, the most important person should get the first — and, therefore, best — serving of food. If a guest is visiting, then they receive the first portion, but otherwise the “head of the house” (usually the husband/father) will receive it. Inevitably, this means that the wife and womenfolk — who are usually the cooks — are served last, and typically do not eat until much later after everyone else has finished eating. This is standard and unremarkable behaviour in traditional Sinhala homes. Sanduni’s reasoning was dictated by such customs. The Buddha — represented by the Buddha image — is the most important person in the house, and, therefore, gets the first serving. This is clearly the case because he is a perfectly enlightened being. Since the “best” (i.e. most expensive) item on the menu is meat or fish, the Buddha, of course, receives meat and fish. To abstain from giving him such food is impolite, perhaps sacrilegious. Nonetheless, Sanduni did not believe that this rule is universal — it is simply a matter of personal preference:

Some people may not like it [giving meat to the Buddha image], but that’s each person’s idea. (Int — 2.2, 5a)

Yasitha was much more ambiguous. He said: “I give it. I give an offering to the temple. For the Buddha offering I don’t give meat or fish, but when I provide the temple offering I use fish.” (Int — 7.1, 1a) At home, Yasitha only offered vegetarian dishes, but at the temple he gave fish. It is possible that this stems from the same reasons that motivated Sanduni — namely, that only the best should be given to the Buddha, and that the Buddha image at the temple embodies the Buddha best (unlike the image in the home). However, whether this is true in the case of Yasitha remained uncertain. In any case, Yasitha did not believe that the offering has to be vegetarian (Int — 7.1, 1a).

These counter-examples are interesting because they show a conflict between two customary ideals: what constitutes ideally polite behaviour versus what constitutes ideally moral behaviour. In the case of Sanduni and Yasitha, although they appeared to both recognise (as per their earlier remarks) that vegetarianism is a morally superior diet, they nonetheless offered meat and fish to the Buddha image. The explanation, certainly in the case of Sanduni and possibly in the case of Yasitha, is that, although vegetarianism is ideal, it is impolite not to give “the best” to the Buddha. What constitutes “the best” food seems to

differ, since the other informants clearly believe that vegetarian food is the best to give in terms of morality. Sanduni and Yasitha seem to take “the best” to mean “the most expensive.” I believe that implicit economic motivations are at play here. Sanduni’s family were the most insistent in giving meat during their *buddha-pūjā* ceremonies, but they were also the richest family. This should not go unnoticed.

(c) *Buddha-pūjā* at the Sri Daladā Māligāva

It is worth closing this section by considering the most important *buddha-pūjā* ceremony of all — the *muruthan pūjā*. This *pūjā* is held at the Sri Daladā Māligāva in Kandy (otherwise known as Nuwara). The Māligāva is a large temple and a central site of worship for Sinhala Buddhists. Inside, the temple is an ornate room that contains an important Buddhist relic: a tooth of the Buddha. The tooth itself is usually hidden from view, and is wrapped up in a gold *stūpa* covered in jewels. This tooth relic is viewed by thousands of tourists and Buddhist pilgrims every year. Most viewers only catch a glimpse of the relic. Especially wealthy and/or lucky patrons are able to arrange a single annual *pūjā* to the relic, once authorised by Māligāva authorities. These special *pūjā* ceremonies afford these lucky pilgrims a uniquely personal experience in front of the relic, where alms can be directly offered to it. Because the tooth relic is an artifact of the Buddha, giving offerings to it is especially meritorious. It is also a time of intense acts of devotion due to the extreme sacredness of the relic. Consequently, the monastic guardians are especially particular about participants following the correct protocol.

The type of offerings supplied to the tooth relic are especially noteworthy for our present purposes, since the Māligāva authorities stipulate that they must be entirely vegetarian. Meats are not allowed. For a detailed examination of the rituals surrounding the giving of alms to the tooth relic, the reader should consult Seneviratne’s excellent study (1978, p. 38). Nonetheless, I will summarise my own experiences here.

Pilgrims to the Māligāva are ushered into a pen in front of the inner sanctum. Around the pen is a landing. Casual pilgrims and tourists congregate there and, at intervals, are led past a small window to view the tooth relic inside. Casual pilgrims and tourists are not allowed inside the inner sanctum. This is reserved for special pilgrims, monks and other officials.

When the time is right the pilgrims are led by Māligāva authorities down a narrow passage and into the inner sanctum. The pilgrims assemble in front of the tooth relic which is hidden behind a large curtain (the curtains are themselves commissioned by the temple and donated by wealthy families).^{clxvii} The inner sanctum is ornate: the walls are decorated with ancient and intricate drawings of the Kandyan *perahāra* (an annual procession around the city where the tooth is transported on the back of an elephant), and very large elephant tusks ornament the entrance to the inner sanctum. All members of the party are in a heightened

state of expectation – being in the direct presence of the tooth relic is considered a very sacred affair, even amongst less pious Buddhists.

After much anticipation, the pilgrims are finally ushered behind the curtain. As they pass, each pilgrim is given a metal dish embellished with special designs and decorated with ornamental clothes. The pilgrim then gives the dish to a monk stationed in front of the relic. The monk carefully places the dish in front of the tooth relic — he is acting, as it were, on behalf of the pilgrim. Sometimes the pilgrim may also place some rupees in a large dish in front of the tooth relic. Sometimes an *aṭṭa apirikara* (the eight requisites of the renunciate) is also offered.^{clxviii} The pilgrim very briefly worships the tooth relic before he is hurried off. A key point about the entire procedure is timing: the window for the *muruthan pūjāva* is very narrow, and so the pilgrims must not dawdle, otherwise this will throw off the timing for all other tooth relic activities. The pilgrim departs from the relic, leaves the inner sanctum, and the party all assemble in the landing outside the sanctum structure. The entire time spent in the physical presence of the relic is perhaps no more than thirty seconds, but the amount of merit produced by that small amount of exposure to the tooth relic is considered very potent.

Families that are able to participate in these private *pūjā* ceremonies receive instructions from the Māligāva authorities in advance of their arrival. In particular, they receive a letter outlining precisely what foods they may supply. As is clear from the translation of the letter only mild vegetarian foods are to be supplied (see Image 8, p. 339). This is a stipulation made by the Māligāva authorities. These vegetarian food items are what find their way into the dishes described above. That the Māligāva tooth relic shrine is considered the most important, and sacred, Buddhist shrine in all of Sri Lanka underscores just how relevant this observation is: the menu at the *muruthan pūjāva* helps to send a strong signal about what is appropriate at home *pūjāva* ceremonies.^{clxix}

The foods listed in the letter are concerned only with the relic offerings. Families are also expected to supply a big *dānē* to the resident monks. Because the Māligāva houses a large number of monks, many of whom are of some national importance, the feasts provided are usually lavish — to say the least. After considering the fact that the lay pilgrims also have to be fed, and in considering accommodation and transportation costs (pilgrims travel from all over the island), the cost of the Māligāva feast is quite considerable. I was told by a member of Nawanga's family that the total cost of the *pūjā* and *dānē* came to around five or six laks (>500,000 Lankan Rupees). This is around five thousand Australian dollars. Clearly, this is unaffordable for most Sri Lankans. Hence, a private audience with the tooth relic is available only to the very wealthy. Even then, however, a family requires luck to secure an audience. Since only one ceremony per day is held, families must wait for openings on the Māligāva calendar to appear. This only happens when previous families elect to stop performing pilgrimages to the tooth relic; this is almost always because such pilgrimages become unaffordable.

Families supply the ingredients described in the letter to the Māligāva authorities so that the Māligāva chefs can prepare the food. Families can elect for the Māligāva authorities to acquire the food on their behalf, but it is considered more meritorious if the families themselves can find the ingredients. Only specially authorised Māligāva cooks may prepare the food for the Buddha offering. The *nāyaka* at Temple D explained this:

[The preparations] have to be done with purity and women cannot be involved; [the cooks] must have covered faces. (Int — 4.4, 15b)

He went onto explain why the cooks must cover their faces — there was a risk that the food would be made impure:

When we talk spit is thrown from the mouth — those germs go into the food and make it unclean. (Int — 4.4, 5c)

This contamination of the food in the presence of the Buddha does bring to mind ideas of food purity more at home in Hindu practices than Buddhist ones. Merely inhaling the food smells might be considered contaminating, because it is inappropriate to smell offerings meant for the Buddha — when offering flowers or incense to a Buddha image or relic, it is considered inappropriate to smell the flowers or incense. This rule is followed with even more diligence when individuals attend sites where Buddha relics are present, such as the Kandyen Daladā Māligāva or the Ruwanwelisāya Stūpa in Anuradhapura. Apart from Hindu influence there is also another explanation for these regulations: the idea is that these offerings are meant to be “consumed” (symbolically) by the Buddha, not by the person supplying them.

As I mention, the offering is entirely vegetarian. Why the food is vegetarian was explained by the *nāyaka* at Temple D. According to the *nāyaka*, the fact that the offering is vegetarian is entirely due to historical happenstance and it seems to reinforce the idea that Hindu practices have influenced Buddhist ones. The practice originated, he said, when King Kīrti Sri Rajasiṃha began requesting different villages to supply food for the *muruthan pūjāva*. However:

by the time meat and fish came to Nuwara there was a Hindu influence. Through influence of Hinduism [...] the cows are greatly refused in Hinduism. This is an

influence from the era of Polonnaruwa. Now, in our moonstone (*sandakadapahana*) in the one in Anuradhapura there are cows — when the Polonnaruwa era came, the cows were left out. (Int — 4.4, 15a)

In other words, at one time, Hindu religious custom became a sudden influence, leading people to begin to practise the giving of vegetarian food to the Buddha relic. This explanation makes a lot of sense in light of what I observe in Chapter 4 about Hindu practices: it is increasingly unpopular to give meat dishes to deities; rather, it is thought that they should receive vegetarian food. It seems plausible that this practice was disseminated within Sinhala Sri Lanka, and that it subsequently influenced the menu at the *muruthan pūjāva*. The Buddha is not a deity; he is above all deities. Therefore, according to this logic, he should be given at least the pure food of the deities — not the defiled food offered to the lower demonic creatures. In Chapter 6, I also argue that this thinking could explain why vegetarian food is similarly required at a *buddha ge* at the Kiri Vehera in Kataragama.

The *nāyaka* did not, however, leave things there. It was not just by accident that Rajasiṃha ordered that only vegetarian food be offered at the Buddha relic. Indeed, it appears that karma plays a role in this. To this extent, vegetarian offerings are not merely some rogue historical anomaly. Morality is also a factor:

Even though, as a Buddhist, King Kīrti Sri Rajasiṃha helped in the deeds of the Buddha *dharmā*, he was a debtor [i.e., he had karmic debt]. [...] Through this, there is a lot of refusing of meat and fish, not just in the Daladā Māligāva, even today in a lot of places, in temples, during Buddha *pūjā*, meat and fish are removed. (Int — 4.4, 1b.)

In other words, Rajasiṃha may have instituted the policy in order to help correct some of his past misdeeds. It was a way of him to do good so as to alleviate his bad karma.

The fact that the offering at the tooth temple is pointedly vegetarian is important for us. To reiterate, the customs and practices enforced at the Daladā Māligāva almost certainly have an impact on ordinary home *pūjāva* practices. Second, the requirement to give meat at the *muruthan pūjāva* reflects an ongoing tendency among laity to give vegetarian food at their own home shrines. Third, as explained by the *nāyaka* above, these practices are ultimately rooted in certain socio-cultural forces, and are probably deeply connected with the Indian-Hindu ritual practices that I discuss in Chapter 4. Nonetheless, these practices also have a decidedly moral component at stake: they are not merely customs born out of a disinterested following of tradition; it is thought that some good comes from it, as Rajasiṃha himself seemed to believe.

It appears that giving meat and fish to Buddha images is generally considered sub optimal. In agreement with the ritual practices I discuss in Chapter 4, the giving of meat and fish to a Buddha image is considered inappropriate. This is particularly the case with respect to the Sri Daladā Māligāva. This is likely connected to a strong Hindu influence whereby the Buddha has been “hinduised”. I discuss this notion of hinduisation in more detail in Chapter 5 (pp. 251-255), where I also discuss the Kataragana *buddha ge*.

(d) Giving Meat and Fish at a *dānē*

The giving of *dānē* to monks is an important custom in Sinhala Buddhism. *Dānē* is etymologically connected to the word “*dāna*”, which is an “act of giving” and is the first (and arguably most important) of the ten good Buddhist deeds (Gombrich 1991, p. 397). A *dānē* is a ceremony in which food and alms are given to monks at a temple or at the alms giver’s own home. In return, the monks who receive the offering preach the *dhamma*. This is known as *baṇa*, roughly, a discourse on the *dhamma*. This is also accompanied by *pirit* – the recitation of Pāli verse. A *dānē* is an occasion in which merit (*pin*) can be collected.

During my fieldwork I attended numerous *dānē* ceremonies. As stated, these ceremonies are accompanied by the giving of *baṇa* and the recitation of *pirit*. In a sense these ceremonies are transactional: the lay people give a *dānē* to the monks, and there is an expectation that the monks will, in return, supply a service to the laity by giving a sermon and reciting Pāli verse. Nonetheless, the mere giving of food (or other items, such as monastic requisites), to the monks is considered a source of merit in itself. I will not discuss the subject of *pirit* and *baṇa* in any further detail, except to say the topics of *baṇa* is usually reasonably conventional: the importance of loving-kindness (*mēṭṭa*) is popular for example. The originality of *baṇa* depends to a large extent on the inventiveness and creativity of the monk supplying it. The *baṇa* is almost always provided by the head monk of the temple while *pirit* is recited by the entire monastic assembly. In general *baṇa* and *pirit* is not especially important for our purposes here.

The *dānē* ceremony proper is an involved process. Depending on the number of monks attending the *dānē*, it may take many hours to prepare the food offering and many lay people may be involved in its preparation. Once prepared, the dishes are laid out on a special table. The monks are seated on low stools covered in a white cloth (white is a sign of purity) in front of low trestle tables (also covered in white sheets). The height of the stools and tables are designed to be in accordance with the *Vinaya*, which requires that monks be seated at low, plain tables and chairs. Each monk is supplied with plates and cutlery – these items are usually the property of the monastery and have been donated by lay patrons. The plates usually have the name of an important lay person on them – usually the person who donated the items to begin with – and the printing of this name ensures that the person shares in the

merit produced by the *dānē* whether they are physically present or not. Apart from the cutlery and plates, other items are supplied, most notably a spittoon, a jug of water and a finger bowl.

When the time is right, each layperson collects one dish from the table and offers that dish to each monk. This is done in a systematic way – the rice dish is offered first, followed by the curries, finally the deserts are supplied. The layperson will announce what is in the curry: e.g. they might say, “*hāmuduruva, mēka kadju hodak*” (“Monk, this is a cashew nut curry”). If the monk does not want that particular curry the monk will simply place his hand over his plate. This goes on until all the dishes (and they are numerous) have been offered. A second helping is then offered in the same fashion. After the main meal is complete, the lay people then offer dessert which usually consists of cakes, sweetmeats, fruits, and buffalo curd and treacle (*kiri pāṇi*). The offerings are concluded by the giving of the *aṭṭ apirikara*, otherwise known as ‘the eightfold requisites of the renunciate’ (i.e. a begging bowl, monastic robes, razor, tooth pick, etc). The *aṭṭ apirikara* is usually reserved for especially important monks and the giving of the *aṭṭ apirikara* confers special merit on the offeree.

As Gombrich suggests, although the laity give alms to monks, they perceive that the monks are doing them a favour by providing them with an opportunity to do a good deed (2006, p. 102). Many significant events in the life of a Sinhala Buddhist are associated with giving a *dānē* to monks. When a house is built or a business is opened, a *dānē* is often given. Similarly, when a member of the family dies, a large *dānē* is provided so that merit can be transferred to the deceased.^{cixx} Rich Buddhists sometimes give *dānē* on birthdays or other important dates, such as wedding anniversaries. I believe that Gombrich correctly suggests that the *dānē* ceremony is really an economic transaction in which good merit can be acquired in the same way that one acquires credit from a bank (2006, pp. 127-128).

Unlike in the case of the *buddha-pūjā*, meat and fish are commonly supplied during a *dānē*. The bigger the *dānē*, the more food options are available to the monks, and this invariably involves a greater assortment of meats. A *dānē* is also a measure of wealth and success. Rich Buddhists tend to want to supply extremely opulent feasts in order to impress the monks.

Moreover, they aim to impress other laypeople. We see presently that social pressure plays a significant role in what sort of food is given at a *dānē*. A word about vegetarian monks, however: as Renuka explicitly notes, “lots of monks don’t eat meat. They say ‘no’ [to meat].” (Int — 1.3, 15a) This has also been my experience. In most of the *dānē* ceremonies that I attended, at least a few vegetarian monks were present. Renuka suggests that vegetarian monks are in the habit of refusing food that has meat in it. This is counter to what other ethnographers have claimed. I consider this problematic view in the following discussion.

Gombrich, for example, states: “Another important principle is that a monk is to be indifferent to the quality of his food; he is not allowed to express any preferences. The corollary of this, in the Buddhist view, is that he is not a vegetarian: if he is given meat, he is to eat it.” (2006, p. 102) Peter Harvey makes a similar point:

If they were given flesh food, and it was pure as described above, to refuse it would deprive the donor of the karmic fruitfulness engendered by giving alms-food. Moreover it would encourage the monks to pick and choose what food they would eat. (2000, p. 160)

Seyfort Ruegg makes similar observations:

... It has to be remembered furthermore that as an almsman the Bhikkhu was not only dependent on the offerings he received on his begging rounds, but that as a person to be honoured (*dakkhineyya*) and a ‘field of merit’ (*puññakkhetta*) he was morally bound to accept any alms offered in good faith by a pious donor and that if he failed to do so he was interfering with the karmic fruit and just reward that the donor was entitled to expect. (1980, p. 239)

Gombrich, Harvey and Seyfort Ruegg all report, then, that vegetarianism among monks is, in effect, a practical impossibility, since monks are expected to take whatever is given to them. However, this expectation has never materialised in any of my (numerous) *dānē* experiences. In fact, monks regularly expressed preferences by refusing not only meat (if they were vegetarians), but also foods that did not agree with them or that they simply disliked. All the monks whom we interviewed agreed that there was no problem whatsoever for a vegetarian monk to refuse meat and fish at a *dānē*, provided it was done respectfully (see Appendix 2 for further details).

As mentioned, monks that do not want a particular dish will simply make this apparent. Srilal explains: “Some folk [he means monks here] accept the offer. Some folk don’t accept the offer.” (Int —7.4, 10a) Because monks typically refuse meat, Srilal’s family only give fish at *dānē* ceremonies. Refusing foods at a *dānē* was considered unremarkable. In fact, the food that is prepared for a *dānē* seems to be largely dictated by the perceived preferences of individual monks (more on this later in Chapter 6). As I argue in Chapter 3, the common idea that monks cannot refuse food is contradicted by the fact that the *Vinaya*

actively requires monks to refuse alms that violate their vows and religious observances. Here we find that the ethnographic data contradicts these claims too.

It should also be noted that other ethnographic research contradicts the idea that monks do not (or should not) refuse food. In Michael Carrithers's ethnographic study of Sri Lankan forest renunciates, he describes an occasion in which a monk of some reputation refused a bowl of fruit offered to him:

At the end of the sermon [the laity] offered him kerosene and honey, which he accepted; and a large bowl of fruit which he rejected. He told them: 'It is not proper to offer monks fruit after twelve noon. They may accept things which keep, such as kerosene and honey, but they may not accept food. (1983, p. 262)

So, not only may monks refuse a food offering, they may even chastise the laity for offering it in the first place.^{clxxi} It seems entirely unremarkable, then, that monks are able to refuse foods.

Some of the informants were sympathetic to giving only vegetarian dishes at *dānē* ceremonies, but ultimately had reservations on account of social pressure. Consider, for example, Chamika the vegetarian. Although her family gave meat and fish to monks, she was not happy about it: "In our house we do give it, but I say it's not worthy to give it. That is to say, the monks eat it because we give it. When we give a *dānē* we ought to know not to give it. That's what I say." (Int — 6.1, 15a) She implies here that she would like to give only vegetarian food, but that, for reasons with which she disagrees, her family nonetheless gives it. It is also possible that, due to her youth, she is unaware of some of the social pressures associated with *dānē* ceremonies, and of what others may think about a *dāyaka* that only gives vegetable dishes.

This issue of social pressure is not to be cast aside lightly. Many Sinhala Buddhists worry about losing face in front of their peers, and a lot of social capital is expended in trying to control gossip.^{clxxii} Nawanga, perhaps the biggest proponent of vegetarianism of all of the informants, was aware of the possible social ramifications surrounding a vegetarian *dānē*. When asked whether he would rather give only vegetarian foods at *dānē* ceremonies, Nawanga replied:

The way things are a lot of the time — the way society (*sammājaya*) is — that is the way that we should work. A lot of the time if I go about my own decision society looks at me differently. That is to say, they might think that I am stingy: 'Maybe that's why he

doesn't give meat?' [they would say]. 'He doesn't give flesh because he's stingy so he doesn't give it to monks.' (Int — 4, 1.1, 10b)

We can see from this discussion that giving vegetarian food at a *dānē* might be construed as being cheap. I believe that this is consistent with Sanduni's motivation for giving meat at her *Buddha-pūjā* ceremony (p. 205): many people view meat as the "best" in that it is the most expensive. In terms of earning social capital, it is essential that people demonstrate their wealth, even if this is at odds with what may or may not be the most moral course of action. The concern over keeping up appearances is just one explanation for why meat and fish are given at a *dānē*. Another reason is related to monastic expectations.

Monastic expectations play an important role in lay motivations. It is important to note that, according to my observations, the laity were generally obedient to monastic desires. The expression of monastic preferences is not generally viewed as contradictory to the Buddha's *dhamma* — whether it is, in fact, a doctrinal contradiction is another matter). Recall, after all, that the Māligāva monks even have an official list of foods that must be supplied for the tooth relic ceremony. This clearly shows some kind of preference for foods that are consistent with the Māligāva policy governing *dānē* ceremonies.

Local monks are also perceived as holding certain dietary requirements, though expectations surrounding these requirements are communicated in a much more informal way. Nawanga was very clear that none of the temples with which he was associated sent out official documents stating what foods were required for a given *dānē*. Such behaviour could be considered unmonkly (the Sri Daladā Māligāva is a special case). Buddhika, one of the Kēgalle informants, was quite adamant that letters *were* supplied by temples that requested particular dishes (see p. 244). Whether letters are or are not supplied is moot here: the laity who attend these *dānē* ceremonies pays close attention to what the monks do or do not eat, so in a sense there is no need for monks to make explicit what they want through letters — what they want is perfectly evident. This results in an informal understanding of what is or is not appropriate to give monks. Nawanga explained:

If we're going to a big *dānē* we generally find out if giving meat is a problem. That is to say, it's okay for us to offer what the monks are going to eat [i.e., otherwise it is a waste]. (Int — 1.1, 5b)

Similarly, he added: "There are monks who like eating [meat and fish] so even in the future I'd still like to offer it, but sometimes I still think I should offer only vegetables." (ibid) Like Chamika, Nawanga dabbled with the idea of only giving vegetable dishes, but, ultimately, his

final decision was motivated by practical considerations concerned with saving face and fulfilling the expectations and desires of the monks. Charuni held a similar idea. She says: “I actually don’t like giving [meat and fish to monks].” Like Nawanga, Charuni aimed to comply with monastic preferences:

If there is a person who eats it then we have to offer it. We give [it] for our merit (*pin*). If someone gives me something I say, ‘Thank you,’ and take it, [but] if I don’t want it I give it to someone else. (Int — 2.1, 10b)

Charuni’s explanation here is basically economic: if a monk likes meat then it should be given because it is meritorious to give and this is the case no matter what is being given. Other considerations are not especially relevant. Under this view, acquiring merit is more important than the potential immorality attached to the actual alms being given. Charuni maintained that what counts is the intention behind the gift rather than the actual gift itself:

There is also this thing: ... Imagine I am a hunter (*dhaḍayakkāra*), if the Buddha came and all I had was meat [because I am a hunter], I would devoutly (*saddhāva*) offer it. (ibid)

Nonetheless, Charuni did believe that, in ideal circumstances, vegetarian food should be supplied. What stops her from doing this, as with the others, is simply a matter of social expectation.

Ānanda, the three-wheel driver, similarly believed that the food given at a *dānē* depended on the monks’ personal tastes. He said that he gives meat and fish to monks, but only because monks like to eat it:

We give it to monks (*hāmudhuravanta denavā*). I give chicken and fish, but not beef. Monks don’t eat beef, right? [put rhetorically]. If monks ate it then I would offer it. (Int — 7.2, 10a)

Let us briefly consider the Māligāva *saṅgheka dānē* / *pūjāva*. As I mention, and in contrast to the *buddha-pūjā* at the tooth relic, meats and fish are conventionally supplied at this large and important *dānē*. We are now in a position to understand why vegetarian food is exclusively

given at the tooth relic *pūjā* (*mūruthan pūjāva*) but not at the Māligāva *dānē* (i.e. the *saṇḥeka pūjāva*).

As in the case of local *dānē* ceremonies, the motivation seems to mainly stem from social pressure rather than any particular ideas about what is morally required — and we even see that social expectations seem to conflict with moral expectations. It is a requirement that only vegetarian food be given at the tooth relic ceremony; but, in the case of the Māligāva *dānē*, monks are thought to expect certain foods, including meat. It is especially important to meet the desires of these important monks — or the desires of any monk, for that matter, but especially if they are “big” (*loku*) monks.

I also suggest that lay expectations are largely at work here, too. As Nawanga suggested, it might seem cheap if only vegetables were given. Pressure to give meat and fish is probably amplified by the importance of the Māligāva *dānē*. It would be an especially grave violation of social custom to give vegetarian food at the Māligāva *dānē*, which is the greatest alms-giving ceremony in the country. This clearly contradicts the requirement that only vegetarian food be given for the *mūruthan pūjāva*. This conflict does not seem to trouble most people.

What I hope to show in this section is that some Sinhala Buddhists believe that vegetarian food should ideally be given to monks during *dānē* ceremonies. That this does not generally happen is explained for reasons unrelated to Buddhism. In short, social expectation is the primary reason for meat and fish being given, even though doing so might contradict what is generally considered to be morally ideal. This moral ideal is explicitly realised in the case of *buddha-pūjā* events: vegetarian food was typically given in those cases, and was always given at the *mūruthan pūjāva*.

One other explanation for this break in custom may relate to the status of monks. Although monks are generally considered to be highly virtuous, most laypeople recognise that they are human beings and are, therefore, imperfect. In being imperfect, they still struggle with their desires (*āsāva*) and greedy feelings (*tanhā*). Perfect beings have conquered such sentiments. Therefore, it is appropriate to give vegetarian food to Buddha images because (in a symbolic way) the Buddha does not need or want meat and fish. Just as Charuni says, the alms given to the Buddha are just *āhāra*, i.e. fuel for sustenance. They are not looked upon as being food in the same way that monks, or laypeople, look upon food. For all of these reasons, I believe that at least some laypeople regard vegetarianism as a soteriological ideal even though this ideal is imperfectly realised. This failure is understandable, of course, because monks are mere human beings like the rest of us. Monks, of course, are not Buddhas or Arahants and are, therefore, subject to human failings.

I posit one final point about food and cultural contexts: the eating of food in Sri Lanka (as with elsewhere in South Asia) is always an occasion in which social ties are cemented.

Offering and receiving food among the Sinhala is a personal and socially rich practice. Unlike in many Western countries, several good reasons exist for one to turn away food when offered (having just eaten is decidedly not a good reason, for example). The informants whom we interviewed almost uniformly offered food and drink (usually “short-eats”, i.e. snacks and tea). It is also customary for visitors to bring a gift, usually food. Food represents a kind of social transaction in Sri Lanka. Hence, the question of what one eats, and how one eats it, is of considerable socio-cultural importance. Refusing food is considered highly impolite in Sinhala culture, but, at the same time, abstaining from certain foods is considered highly pious (or at least medically sound) in other contexts. This is just part of the complex issue of eating in Sinhala custom.

III – Summary and Closing Remarks

In closing, I argue in this chapter that a strong pro-attitude towards vegetarianism was evident among my community of informants. This was apparent in at least two specific ways: First, it became obvious through their explicit pronouncements in favour of vegetarianism. Most of the informants thought that vegetarianism was a morally ideal dietary practice, which was in fulfilment of the Buddha’s *dharmā*. A few non-vegetarian informants were less taken by the idea, but, in most cases, even they admitted that there was great virtue in the practice.

Second, the pro-attitude was also evident through the practice of giving vegetarian food to Buddha images during *buddha-pūjā* ceremonies. Nearly all of the informants agreed that the ritual was best carried out when vegetarian food was offered. The suggestion was that it was improper to supply a perfect being — like the Buddha — with impure foods, such as meat and fish. Of course, some disagreed on this point; but I suggest that this disagreement has more to do with social expectation — and economic considerations — rather than anything to do with moral scruples. Finally, I suggested that the conflict between moral expectation and social expectation is most forcefully articulated in the case of *dāṇē* activities. Some informants believed that, ideally, only vegetables ought to be offered to monks during a *dāṇē*. However, due to social pressure, these ideal practices were never fully realised.

These observations sometimes agree with and sometimes contradict previous ethnographic studies. In particular, I suggest that consciousness surrounding vegetarianism is much more widespread than previously suggested. I also argue that many of the practices that seem to demonstrate an indifference towards vegetarianism are not motivated by the idea that vegetarianism is counter to the Buddha’s *dharmā*, but rather because vegetarianism contradicts certain non-Buddhist social expectations. Moreover, it seems that many hold the idea that vegetarianism, although good, is only for the very pious. Rathnakāra expressed the view that vegetarianism is a pious activity most forcefully. He does, however, represent something of an outlier: most of the informants did not maintain such extreme views. But this pro-attitude towards vegetarianism among the laity differed from the attitude

typically displayed by the clergy. In the next and final chapter, Chapter 6, I consider the attitudes the clergy displayed towards vegetarianism, and contrast them with the typical lay position. I close Chapter 6 by attempting to explain how this divergence could have occurred.

^{cxxxvi} *mangala mesaya, upan dina sādaya, priya sambhāṣaṇaya rasavath kirīma sandahā oba ketharam ahinsaka satthva jīvitha bili ganneda?* (pp. 10-11, para. 5, 2009)

^{cxxxvii} *thama mava, piyā, soyosuran, soyosuriyan samaga sathutin siti sathukuge siruren gath mas kāllak novanneda?* (Rathnakāra, p. 12, para. 2, 2009)

^{cxxxviii} *thānin thānata gos gavayan. eluvan, urran, kuku/ an thorā berā gena, milata gena, lorivala gāl karagena, kuḍuvala hirakaragena nirāhāra va sāthāpum gaṇṇāvak yana gamana ke/ avara porakaya bava ovuhu danithi.* (Rathnakāra, p. 14, para 1, 2009)

^{cxxxix} As Gombrich notes, a *prārṭ anā* is not just a wish, but a religious wish. It is close to the idea of a prayer, except that the goodness of the thought alone provides enough efficacy for the good result — a *prārṭ anā* is not resolved by a deity. Here we find the word used in an interesting way: Rathnakāra argues that, because all Buddhists wish that all beings be happy, it follows from this that they oughtn't be eaten.

^{cxl} *mas, mālu lāmata virud ṭ a thahanchiyak budu dahame nomāthi bava sāṭaki. eheth siyalu satthvayan suvath vevā yāyi prārṭ anā karanne nam, prāṇa ghāthayen vālākī siṭ imi yāyi porondu vane nam* (Rathnakāra, p. 5, para. 1, 2009)

^{cxli} Note that this is the orthographic style as it appears in Rathnakāra's book. It is not accurate to the actual Pāli orthography, but I have nonetheless retained Rathnakāra's idiosyncratic spelling.

^{cxlii} *kisi ma jīvithayakata hāniyak nokarana bavayi. eka vachanayakin pavasanne nam ahinsāvayi. nirmala budṭ āgame ismathu vana ithā ma shre ṣ iṭ a vachanaya da ahinsāvayi. mediyatha upan manuṣ ayyanta pamaṇak nova sāma prā ṇiyakuta ma, sāma pā/ ā ṭ iyakata ma ahinsāva dāktiya yuthu bava budu dahama deshanā karayi.* (Rathnakāra, p. 2, para. 4, 2009)

^{cxliii} *pansil gena karaṇiya methaku sūthraya gāyanā kara kussiyatayana (the kitchen) āya pihiya athata gena kuttivalata kapanne shīthakaraṇayen (i.e. a refrigerator, but literally 'a doer of cold') e/ iyata gannā kuku/ ā ya.* (p. 4, para. 2, 2009)

^{cxliv} This hypocrisy is noted elsewhere in *Give us Space to Live*. Rathnakāra wonders how a mother can be familiar with these verses and yet supply her child with slices of meat. (p. 5, para. 4, 2009)

^{cxlv} *mas mānsa kana boudṭ ayā pa! amu shikṣa a padaya pamaṇak nova mūlika shikṣa a pada sathrak ma ullanganaya karanne ya.* (p. 5, para. 5)

^{cxlvi} *dāna dāna ma ape sirurata mas mānsa samanga viṣa kavā gannā api noyekuth rogavalata goduru vanemu. [...] satthvayan thu! a, mathsayyan thu! a, pakṣin thu! a, bitthra thu! a pi! ikā roga lakṣaṇa thibena bavata dān soyā fena thibe.* (p. 16, para. 4)

^{cxlvii} *thavada sathunge mo! aye “brin bag” namāthi kuchā kṛ umi visheṣ ayak hata ganī. me kṛ umiyā nam viṣa pathuruvālimata avuruda dahayaka pamaṇa kālayak ganī. ovuth āthi karanne mānasika rogayi. pissu sādanne me kṛ umiyā lāgum gena siti sathāge mas anubhavayen minisāta da pissu vātena bava vēdayavaru soyāgena thibe.* (p. 17, para. 1)

^{cxlviii} Note that all the interview quotations use a referencing system that directs the reader to Appendices 1 and 2. Please see the notes for those appendices for full details of the system.

^{cxlix} Ryan observes: “More than any others the Karāva have embraced Christianity, principally Roman Catholicism.” (1953, p. 105)

^{cl} These comments need to be qualified somewhat. First, it certainly appears that at other times in history, ritual pollution played a larger role in the Sinhala caste system than it does now. Knox, for example, reports (writing sometime around 1700) that the upcountry Kandyans “abhor to eat or drink, or intermarry with any of Inferior Quality to themselves,” (p. 116) and that higher and lower castes were marked in obvious ways, e.g. by the way in which their clothes were arranged (p. 117). This suggests that caste was much more important during the period when Knox was writing. It also implies that Sinhala society — or at least the upcountry — was much more influenced by Hinduism than it is now (something also confirmed by the monk at Temple D). A second point of qualification to observe that ritual pollution may still play a role in Sinhala custom even now, and that this is also related to caste. For example, when a girl first begins to menstruate, it is customary to throw a large party. During this party, a low caste *radha* woman comes to the home of the upper-caste girl and takes away all of her old clothes (the clothes worn prior to menstruation), helping also to bathe the girl. The implication here is that menstrual fluids are unclean and polluting and must be handled by a person of a lower caste. If this is the case, then it is at least one example of a case where traditional Hindu issues of ritual pollution play a role in Sinhala custom. It is not clear, however, whether this is a widely recognised issue, because there is a definite sense that caste distinctions do not play as big a role as they do in India.

^{cli} He says: “Only the Roḍiyā could contaminate raw paddy. The Kandyan aristocrats’ insistence upon kitchen help of the *Goyigama* or of *Vahumpura* status is entirely unrationalised, on any but historical, traditional grounds. Nor is the use of common well for drinking water frowned upon; only the Roḍiyā will stand off and respectfully beg a man of

higher caste to fill his vessel for him. Similarly meat shot by a man of any caste would not be polluted in the eyes of the *Goyigama*, except perhaps if that man was I.” (1953, p. 158)

^{clii} Admittedly the idea of Protestant Buddhism Sinhala culture is subject to considerable debate. Prothero (1995), for example, has argued that such a label is inappropriate. For the purposes of this thesis I will not be involved in this debate except to say that I find Gombrich & Obeyesekere’s arguments largely compelling.

^{cliii} The principle of dependent origination (*paṭ icca samuppāda*) is an essential Buddhist principle mentioned often throughout the entire Pāli canon, but a good example of the idea is in MN 115.11, p. 927.

^{cliv} This is described by Gombrich & Obeyesekere as a *ṣ ānta dānta* person, a person who is “calm and controlled” (1988, p. 29).

^{clv} He says here, *loku baudayo*, which literally emans “big Buddhists”, but in this context would mean “important.”

^{clvi} Baila is a music style unique to Sri Lanka. It is a type of dance music that combines European instrumentation and rhythms with Sinhala lyrics.

^{clvii} The song’s date of release was not determined.

^{clviii} chorus: *kiri dunne daruvantayi siruren āge / pipun minisun vāḍune balayeni āge / e ka/ a guṇa nodanna his menisun vāge / epā epā mas kannata kiri ammāge // ahinsaka thirisan gavayātath paṇayi thiyenne / evan satheku aho akālaye kimada maranne / tikak hithala balanuṇ p irisindu thanakola kanne / namuth minisath bava lābu oba āyi malakuṇu kanne / kenek thipas vasarak kāvoth gavamas uyalā / gaṇana do/ os dahas hathsiya hātth pahak velā / obata therānāda oba kala pav dura diga nobalā* [chorus] // *mudal thanhāven samaharu gavayā vikuṇanne / ahinsaka sathakuge iraṇama inpasu visadenne / yalith e mudalin mas genavith rasakara kanne / thaman vikuṇu gavayage mas bava ohu nā danne / githel mi kiri e/ akiri pasgorasa sapayanne / ivathalun pohorin saru maha e/ avalu kotu saruvanne / mevan sathakuge mas nokana ayata detha sālasenne / evan pirisindu hadavath thu/ a deviyan vāḍa inne* [chorus].

^{clix} This is a unique Sinhala idiom: *mage vayasath sampūranavela* is a poetic way of saying “upon the completion of my life”.

^{clx} Nawanga claimed that this idea came from a *sutta*, but I could not find what the *sutta* was.

^{clxi} He then returns to Sinhala and uses the word *siṭ a*, which means something like “heart/mind”.

^{clxii} Rhys Davids states in his *Pali-English dictionary* that *tanhā* is a state of mind that “leads to rebirth.” (2011, p. 294) Childers makes a similar point noting that *tanhā* links one to conditioned arising. (2003, p. 495) It means, “lust, desire, human passion.” (ibid)

clxiii In a separate conversation, Sanduni mentioned a driver she knew who carelessly ran over a snake. As a result, when the driver produced a child, the child had a deformed arm — as if it had been run over by a tyre. The negative karma of harming an animal was transferred, not just to the person who engaged in the wrong activity (here the driver), but also to the son, who is seemingly innocent. Sanduni's view here seems to be unorthodox. Typically, karma is not inherited genetically from another — it is produced only by the agent.

clxiv See: Connie Levett's 'Buddha Boy has nation guessing: holy or hoax?', *The Age*, February 11, 2006 <http://www.theage.com.au/news/world/buddha-boy-has-nation-guessing-holy-or-hoax/2006/02/10/1139542406197.html>, accessed August, 2012.

clxv A small text called *The Mirror of the Dhamma* (2005) lists all the Pāli verses to be uttered during the various *buddha-pūja* activities.

clxvi This was a point addressed among the Kēgalle informants. Isuru, for example, noted that monks are allowed to eat food in the evenings, provided it is a medicine to cure an illness (Int — 8.1, 10a).

clxvii By way of example, one of the families associated with the informants we interviewed had donated an ornate crimson coloured curtain several years before. That curtain was decorated with a *perahāra* design and an image of the tooth relic. I got the impression that the Māligāva had a large number of such curtains in storage. I was not clear as to what procedure the authorities used to decide on which curtain to use.

clxviii The giving of the *aṭṭ apirikara* at the tooth relic is especially fortuitous and confers special benefits on the offeree.

clxix To give one an idea of the power and authority that the Māligāva has over the laity, I relay the following story told to me by an associate of one of the lay informants. As a background, it should be noted that this person is a devout Buddhist who attends a yearly *muruthan pūjāva* at the Māligāva. One of her great culinary delights is pork. One year, a few days before her date at the Māligāva, this layperson ate a large pork curry, which had been specially prepared for her. Yet, the night before attending the ceremony at the Māligāva, she had a dream whereby a person dressed in white (i.e. a faithful *upāsaka*) came to her and told her that she was wasting all her good merit (pin) by having pigs killed and eating them. The next day, she ran late for the *muruthan pūjāva* and was not able to attend. This was the first time it had ever happened to her and was a huge blow. She connected this misfortune with the dream, and vowed never to eat pork again.

clxx Martin Southwold mentions some of these ceremonies in his anthropological study, in particular the *mataka dānē* - the *dānē* ceremonies performed at intervals after someone has passed away (1983, p. 170).

clxxi Nonetheless, other monks in Carrithers's study contradicted this behaviour explicitly. Jinavaṃsa, an important monk in his study, makes the following claim: "A monk should be

satisfied with whatever he gets. If some layman comes and says he wants to spend a million rupees on a hermitage, let him. The monk should say nothing.” (1983, p.263) Carrithers comments that the general view seems to be that a monk must accept whatever is given to him, provided that accepting the offering does not interfere with his spiritual development. This is amply demonstrated in an earlier chapter. This provision is extremely important because, for some monks, accepting meats does interfere with their development. It is an important point not to be cast aside lightly.

^{clxxii} This is known as *opā dūpa*, lit. “[talking about] this and that,” c.f. (Jayawardhana 2011, p. 56).

CHAPTER 6 | MONASTIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS VEGETARIANISM

The previous chapter demonstrates that a significant number of laypeople approve of vegetarianism. This was the case even among those who were ordinarily meat eaters. In all of these cases, informants spontaneously recognised a natural connection between the first precept and vegetarianism. For these people, the principle of non-violence is partly expressed through a person's diet.

This prevailing lay view contrasts strongly with the position adopted by many of the monks. This chapter outlines the monastic view, contrasts it with the lay case, and attempts to explain how this divided opinion may have arisen.

Generally (but not always), the monks whom we interviewed followed the *Vinaya* in a conservative way. The *Vinaya* states — as we find in Chapter 3 — that meat may be eaten if the animal is not seen, heard or suspected of having been killed for the monk. I call this the permissibility clause (see pp. 103-106). Being aware of this, many monks did not see the issue of meat consumption as being a moral issue at all. For them, meat eating was sanctioned by the Buddha. I call this position “the standard view”. In the following, I examine how this view emerges, and what it means for the monks whom I interviewed.

Of course, not all monks agreed with the standard view. Several unusual cases defied conventional expectations. I consider these differing views towards the end of the chapter. It must be said from the outset that the monks in question were often iconoclastic in certain interesting ways. One particular example of this is a European monk who was interviewed at one of the large temples in central Colombo. Another example is a monk whom we interviewed in Kataragama near the Kataragama *dewalaya*. He maintained a main Buddhist temple in the Kataragama precinct, and his *buddha ge* was exclusively vegetarian. In Colombo, we discovered another important example of a monk who diverged from the classical monastic view. This monk ran an animal welfare society; he was actively involved in cow protectionism. In this capacity, he campaigned, in particular, on behalf of cows, and was quite politically active.

I explain the apparent division between the monastic and lay position in two ways. First, I argue that animal welfarism presupposes some degree of political activism and that this activism is anathema to most traditionally minded monks. In this regard, it is plausible to conceive of the Buddhist vegetarian movement as being, in part, an example of Protestant Buddhism as Gombrich & Obeyesekere describe. According to Gombrich & Obeyesekere, the Protestant Buddhist movement is mildly opposed to the more conservative Buddhist movement nominally championed by most of the monastic orthodoxy (1988). As we can see, some monks are, of course, in favour of Buddhist Protestantism (such as the monk who ran

the cow protection society), but these usually represent outlier cases. This idea of Protestant Buddhism was introduced in Chapter 5 and I will discuss this idea and other matters at length later in this chapter (p. 264).

Second, I also suggest that the differing views between the laity and the clergy can be explained in another way: namely in relation to the different textual sources that laypeople and monks rely on. Laypeople habitually encounter textual materials that make explicit pro-animal discourses, while monks are much more conscious of their monastic regulations. As detailed in chapters 1 to 3, these different sources favour different readings concerning non-violence to animals. *Jātaka* tales, for example, are very popular among the laity and are a key source of moral guidance for them. Because these tales are explicitly pro-animal, it stands to reason that the laity would be concerned with the plight of animals to a greater degree than the monks as they are exposed to these ideas in a more aggressive way. The clergy, after all, are highly dependent on the *Vinaya*, which, as I note, is much more ambiguous about the moral relevancy of animals (see pp.28-31).

Overall, I demonstrate a tension between the views of the laity and the views of the monks. This adds to tensions I already establish in previous chapters, such as the tension arising within Sinhala history between the doing of necessary violence and the Buddhist ideal that a Buddhist should engage in only pacific, non-violent activities (see Chapter 4). To some extent, these tensions are mutually co-entailing with the textual tensions that I consider in Chapter 3 (e.g. p.157). There, I argue that the texts implicitly endorse vegetarianism, but explicitly reject it. This, naturally, is a source of tension.

The overall result is this: the state of animal non-violence, and, in particular, the state of ethical vegetarianism in Theravāda Buddhism — and Sinhala Buddhism more specifically — is strained.

I – “The Question of Vegetarianism”

In beginning this discussion of the monastic views, I begin by first looking at a book published by a monk called **ආණ්ඩා** Thera. His book is titled *The Question of Vegetarianism* (*nirmānsha prashniyo*). In it, Gñānanda Thera examines a multitude of issues relating to Buddhism and vegetarianism. Suffice to say, the text is too detailed for me to study here in full. However, the book does preempt some of the views of the monastic informants, and is a good example of what might be called “the standard view”. The view is just this: food practices are not particularly morally relevant, and the Buddha’s message on this question is clear — meat consumption is acceptable for monks. Since the Buddha allows meat eating, there is no moral hazard in the consumption of meat.

Another feature of the **ආණ්ඩා** Thera text is that it acts as a useful foil to the Rathnakāra text that I discuss in the Chapter 5 (pp. 172-178). There, Rathnakāra is enthusiastic about animal welfare, and this largely stems from his Buddhist convictions. Here,

with Gñānanda Thera, we have the opposite situation. First, Rathnakāra is a layperson and Gñānanda Thera is a monk. Second, Rathnakāra defends vegetarianism on Buddhist grounds while Gñānanda Thera rejects vegetarianism as a Buddhist activity.

This distinction again informs one of the general observations evident from the data, i.e. that a difference exists between the standard view advocated by the monastic majority and the pro-animal, pro-vegetarian view defended by some lay individuals, such as Rathnakāra.^{clxxiii} I consider this general theme in more at the end of this chapter (see p. 261); I put it aside for now, so that the reader may keep this in mind during the following discussion.

The Question of Vegetarianism is, stylistically, a dialogue between an unnamed interlocutor and Gñānanda Thera. The interlocutor is plainly a Protestant Buddhist of the stripe we already encounter in cases such as Rathnakāra, Dhammapala and Olcott (for the latter two, see Chapter 4, p.154). Gñānanda Thera's role in the dialogue is to rebut the central claim that Buddhism demands vegetarianism (a case I also attempt to make in Chapter 3, albeit in a less explicit way). In this way, Gñānanda Thera adheres strictly to the *Vinaya*, and, in the course of this, he arrives at the standard view — a view with which the majority monks whom I interviewed agreed — that vegetarianism is not only merely optional, but is not even a morally recommendable diet.

This is not to say that Gñānanda Thera has not dabbled in vegetarianism before. The interlocutor observes that Gñānanda Thera was previously known as a vegetarian but that , since then, he has abandoned this diet. In reply, Gñānanda Thera writes:

It was true then. At that time I was a vegetarian [...] about that period of great arrogance, how much have I again and again described? How much, like so many other folk, was [I] eating vegetarian food only because of having made a promise? [I.e., an empty vow]. At the time, powerful answers were aimed at. [...] Therefore I consumed vegetarian food and existed in a great manner of proud inflexibility.^{clxxiv}

Gñānanda Thera understands the issue of vegetarianism and Buddhism because he was once himself a vegetarian Buddhist. But he has since adopted a different stance because he found the position ultimately defective. The purpose of his dealings with the interlocutor is more or less to explain in precise detail why he found the view defective.

Counter to some of the lay views expressed in the last chapter, Gñānanda Thera does not believe that vegetarianism is entailed by the first precept. Having quoted a passage from the *suttas* concerning the first precept and the good attached to non-killing, Gñānanda Thera nonetheless observes:

The Venerable Lord Buddha has said, ‘Being a woman or being a man [i.e., in either case] the consumption of meat and fish is appropriate’ – the verses for life (*prāṇagāthaya*) are not devoid of it [i.e., meat eating].^{clxxv}

Yet, despite his reluctance to endorse vegetarianism, Gñānanda Thera differs from some pro-vegetarian Buddhists (such as Rathnakāra) in that he tends to avoid relying on rhetoric and polemical language to advance his case.^{clxxvi} Rather, Gñānanda Thera uses a rational approach to try to dismantle his opponent’s position by engaging the Pāli sources and arguing his case internal to certain facts accepted by all Buddhists. For example, in the previous quotation, he appeals to the authority of the Buddha, and we can see that the Buddha’s authority is a fact shared by all devout Buddhists. Gñānanda Thera also suggests no logical entailment between the principle of non-violence and the issue of what you may eat (and I would agree with him were it not for certain passages in the Pāli texts that include an encouragement clause. This is the basis of my argument in Chapter 3, in any case).

We can see that Gñānanda Thera acknowledges the first precept and the fact that the Buddha rejected animal killing. He also accepts that the Buddha rejected the consumption of certain types of meat as well, but, in so doing, he also accepts that some meat is allowable:

Friend, the Venerable Lord Buddha [said] it is not appropriate for you to eat several types of meat and so a ban was uttered. [This ban] occurs in the ‘discipline basket’ [i.e. the *Vinaya*].^{clxxvii}

The types of meat mentioned are the ones described in the *Vinaya*. Gñānanda Thera lists them (elephant flesh, horse flesh, dog flesh, etc.). For example, he says that tiger and lion flesh is banned because the smell of lion flesh attracts other lions and, therefore, puts monks’ lives in jeopardy: “Having eaten that lion flesh the venerable monks went to their dwelling in the forest. Like this, to that smell of flesh on the trail the lions came and killed those same monks.”^{clxxviii} He then recounts the circumstances under which the Buddha banned the consumption of human flesh. His version is essentially unchanged from the *Vinaya*. The story explains how a devout layperson was called upon to prepare a meat broth for an ill monk, but with no meat being handy — owing to all the butcheries being closed — the layperson cut the flesh from her own body (the text reads: “Next, alas, her flesh was cut with a knife from her own thigh and it was given to her servant [with the instructions that it be put in the broth].”) ^{clxxix}

Notice that Gñānanda Thera here highlights an important point: the reason that meat is banned in these circumstances is not for moral reasons relating to our obligations to animals. Rather, meat is banned for prudential reasons, namely because the consumption of this meat directly and indirectly leads to humans being harmed: indirectly, in the case of the lion and tiger meat, because the eating of this flesh puts the monks at risk by attracting wild animals; directly, in the case of the human flesh, because cannibalism presupposes suffering on the part of the person who gives their own flesh.^{clxxx}

Part of the reason that Gñānanda Thera is so preoccupied with listing all the banned meats versus all the non-banned meats — which is to say, all the ones not otherwise listed — is because he regards those who become vegetarians out of Buddhist piety as being fundamentally misguided. It is clear, he argues, that although some meats are banned, most are not. In one passage, Gñānanda Thera refers to the permissibility clause^{clxxxi}, saying that monks may eat meat, provided it has not been seen, heard or suspected to have been killed for the monk, and provided it is not one of the stipulated banned meats (p. 30, para. 1).

This point about the permissibility clause is addressed in Chapter 3, but is a sticking point within the clergy: it comes up again in my analysis of the monastic ethnographic data.^{clxxxii} In connection with his view that pro-Buddhist vegetarians are misguided, Gñānanda Thera writes:

Various children [of the *Dhamma*] who are free of knots are themselves noble vegetarians. This is a foremost life that follows non-violence towards animals [but] they have not been taught the middle way. [...]. Today, even the bodies of naked ascetic hearers who act out of devotion by mixing their clothes with water attempt to purify their appearance [if only] out of a need to observe respect for their elders. Naked ascetics go to places here and there [as a] peacock carries around his tail feathers.^{clxxxii}

Here, Gñānanda Thera challenges the vegetarian view in a number of ways. First, he accuses the Buddhist vegetarian of being unfamiliar with the *dhamma*. This links back to his point that meat consumption is plainly allowed, if not endorsed, by the Buddha; but he more explicitly maintains that Buddhism is a middle way between two extremes — something that the vegetarian Buddhist has overlooked.

Second, he suggests that vegetarianism is connected with naked asceticism, a practice admonished by the Buddha for its inherent extremism. But he even maintains that the naked ascetic is less extreme than the vegetarian because the ascetic at least attempts to follow the middle path in a rudimentary way by occasionally washing his body. Third, Gñānanda Thera implies that, like other such ascetics, the vegetarian is motivated by

improper ends — namely out of vanity. In this way, the vegetarian is similar to a preening peacock. This vanity is, of course, counter to traditional Buddhist doctrine.^{clxxxiii}

Gñānanda Thera concludes this line of argument by suggesting that the entire debate over the virtues of vegetarianism is spurious in light of the Buddha's evident disinclination to really broach the subject:

They say that this is the highest view of non-violence [i.e. vegetarianism] [yet] the Lord Buddha was not a naked ascetic. If the venerable Lord desired to trouble his sleep [over it] he would have instigated a debate about it.^{clxxxiv}

Contrary to the pro-vegetarian Buddhist view, no connection exists between the first precept and vegetarianism. We know this because the Buddha himself was silent regarding such a connection. For a traditionally-minded Buddhist, such an observation is, quite naturally, a knock-down argument. Gñānanda Thera concludes this passage by noting that these misunderstandings of Buddhism could easily be remedied if the laity elected a well-educated head layman to settle these sorts of disputations:

In this way you may assemble your best lay hearers [and] a chief householder [over] the Buddhist hearers can be appointed [so that] we can get away from this [sort of] hot blooded speech.^{clxxxv}

Notice some implications here: First, the author implies that the question of vegetarianism is basically a lay matter. For Gñānanda Thera, worthy monks would not make such basic errors, because they are properly educated in these subtle topics.

Second, Gñānanda Thera appears to hold the view that these sorts of lay disputes be settled within the lay community — by the lay community — and that monastic intervention must be necessarily limited or altogether absent. This suggests a disconnection between lay and monastic activities. The idea that laypeople and monks have different responsibilities is a matter that reoccurs in the following monastic study. I turn now to this subject.

II – The Standard View About Vegetarianism

Gñānanda Thera's view so described could be construed as a good representation of what can be called "the standard view" about vegetarianism, a view that appears to be current within the monastic community. Gñānanda Thera's take is, perhaps, a more elaborate view

than what is outlined in the interviews; however, it roughly corresponds to a dominant view among the monastic informants. The standard view is approximately this: the question of whether vegetarianism is entailed by Buddhist Ethics is easily settled by considering the fact that the Buddha allowed meat consumption. Vegetarianism, under this view, is merely an optional practice. The degree to which monks sympathised with vegetarianism varied in my study. I consider the degrees of variance here.

Before I begin to examine the interview data, it is useful to note the manner by which the research topic was received by some monastic institutions. Some leading temples quickly rebuffed initial approaches, which is, in itself, interesting. The *nāyaka* (head monk) of a famous and highly influential feeder temple in a central Colombo district would not even agree to any face-to-face interviews, stating that the issue was, in fact, a non-issue and that any monk we interviewed would simply relate identical answers to the questions that we wished to pose. This prediction, as one would expect, turned out to be false. But it is useful to observe an expectation among some senior clergy that certain questions are not worth asking, and that any monk asked such a question would answer uniformly.^{clxxxvi} Other *nāyaka* made similar remarks at other important temples in the area.

Evidently, these *nāyaka* considered the question of vegetarianism a non-question, and, therefore, that those who thought there was a question to answer were in error. This attitude of “setting things straight” is perhaps best expressed by a monk at Temple A, who was willing to be interviewed, but did not wish to be recorded.^{clxxxvii} I include him here in the preliminary discussion, partly for this reason, but partly also because he is a good example of the attitude expressed so strongly by the head monks at the aforementioned temples.

The monk wished to communicate what he believed to be the standard position on the question of vegetarianism in Buddhism. He was very explicit that it was not a disputable matter, and that we would receive the same answer from anyone interviewed. He made the following points (paraphrased from notebooks): First, he regarded vegetarianism as a position that has been more or less exclusively adopted by Jainism, a view that the Buddha rejected due to its extreme nature (see Chapter 3, p. 108). This objection is similar to an objection made by Gñānanda Thera, who concludes that vegetarianism is similar to naked asceticism. Furthermore, it is useful to consider that naked asceticism is, sometimes, in the canonical texts, associated with some types of Jainism. Making this point, the monk discussed the case of the *Jīvaka sutta*, a *sutta* wherein the Buddha is challenged by the Jains. They accuse him of accepting flesh food knowing that the animal had been killed on his behalf. The Buddha, of course, disputes this and restates the permissibility clause that I mention previously. But the monk’s point here was that meat consumption is allowed and that this position differs from the Jains, a religious group who feature unfavourably in this *sutta*.

Second, the monk regarded vegetarianism as being a practical impossibility, because animals are killed and their products are used in the production of medicines. Because the

use of medicines is entirely unavoidable, vegetarianism as an ethical practice is inconsistent.^{clxxxviii} He raised this inventive point repeatedly throughout the discussion. Other alleged facts about vegetarianism appear to make it impossible. For example, the monk claimed that vegetarians could not be adequately supplied with vitamin B12. Another practical issue was that a vegetarian might eat meat by accident. In such a circumstance, they would not have maintained their diet. Since this possibility cannot be ruled out, vegetarianism is unreliable from a purely pragmatic point of view.

In general, the monk maintained a position whereby he believed that vegetarianism was an extreme view and, therefore, un-Buddhist. By way of example, the monk also mentioned abortion and euthanasia as cases where it is important not to adopt extreme, absolute positions but that one must consider these matters on a case-by-case basis. He seemed to imply that we should consider vegetarianism in a similar manner. For the most part, however, he was skeptical of it.

Noteworthy is that this monk viewed vegetarianism as a practice that was only justifiable on the basis of health. This sort of prudential reasoning resonates with ~~G~~ñāṇanda Thera's writings that I discuss in prior sections. Gñāṇanda Thera, for example, follows the *Vinaya* in stating that eating lion flesh is bad, but not because it harms the lion. Rather, it is bad because it might attract more lions and, thus, bring about monastic casualties. Evidently, this is a prudential rather than a moral argument against eating lion flesh. The notion that vegetarianism is justifiable on prudential grounds was a popular opinion among the monastic informants whom we studied. In particular, health concerns were the most important consideration. The details of this fact unfold in due course.

The previous cases represent some extreme examples of monks who, because they believed the question posed was a non-problem, wished to shut down the discussion. However, this was a minority view. Most monks were willing to participate in the interview process even if they consequently concluded that vegetarianism was not a necessity in Buddhism. The majority of monks at least accepted that a question existed to be answered. In this regard, they were willing to acknowledge, contra ~~an~~āṇanda Thera and the monks I mention, that the pro-vegetarian position was not entirely misguided and that there was something to be answered for. They still largely concluded, however, that there was ultimately no problem with the consumption of meat — at least there is no problem from the monastic perspective (not necessarily the lay perspective).

(a) The Importance of Caste Affiliation

As discussed in Chapter 5 (see p. 180), Sri Lanka is influenced to some extent by caste (*kulaya*) differences, though not to the same extent as in India. In some ways, caste differences are especially important within the monastic context, because caste determines

what *nikāya*, or monastic branch, a prospective monk can join. In the public view, at least, some *nikāya* are more prestigious than others.^{clxxxix}

So, for example, the Siyam *nikāya* is widely considered the best *nikāya*. But admission to this *nikāya* is limited only to those of the *goyigama* caste.^{cx} The *goyigama* caste is the highest caste in Sri Lanka; however, within that main caste are numerous sub-castes, which are discoverable primarily through knowing an individual's pre-name (*vāsagama*).^{cxci} By establishing the *nikāya* that a monk belongs to, we are therefore able to establish the general socio-economic background of the monks interviewed. Furthermore, we are also better able to predict the monk's attitude towards new, perhaps unorthodox, ideas, because some *nikāya* are more traditional than other *nikāya*. This might have an impact on, or help to explain, the views that these monks happen to have adopted. Luckily, establishing a monk's *nikāya* is relatively simple — it is, for the most part, a matter of public knowledge — though it must be acknowledged that not all the monks' *nikāya* could be reliably established (those monks have been listed as 'unknown').^{cxcii}

There are three *nikāya* in Sri Lanka: Siyam, Amarapura and Ramañña. The Ramañña *nikāya* is, perhaps, the least respected and also the most unorthodox.^{cxci} None of the monks that we studied were affiliated with Ramañña. All of the temples were affiliated with either the Siyam *nikāya* or the Amarapura *nikāya*.^{cxci} This is consistent, however, with our selection criteria: Ramañña temples are quite often rural hermitages, and we intentionally approached temples in urbanised areas. Siyam and Amarapura are very common everywhere, but especially in urban centres; hence, it stands to reason that all of our informants were members of the Siyam and Amarapura *nikāya*. The Siyam *nikāya* is the dominant *nikāya* both politically and economically and, as I mention, only selects *goyigama* for membership and ordination. The Amarapura *nikāya*, on the other hand, selects from all of the different castes. This, unfortunately, makes caste designation difficult to establish in these particular cases.

Laypeople's respect of the Siyam *nikāya* is, in part, due to caste affiliations. Because the Siyam *nikāya* only allows *goyigama* to join its ranks, it thus gives the impression of exclusivity and, in any case, *goyigama* enjoy a privileged status in Sinhala society. It is absurd to think, for example, that a top politician would be anything other than a *goyigama*. Top jobs, and top monastic positions, are reserved for *goyigama*. Note that this is also subject to some tension. Amarapura naturally suffers somewhat from its affiliation with different castes. However, *nikāya* also attract respect in other ways. Reformist monastic movements are often highly praised by the general public, and less traditional *nikāya* are more likely to attempt such reformations than more traditional monastic branches. The Ramañña *nikāya* is a good example of a low-caste *nikāya* that is respected in terms of its religious idealism. Ultimately, however, economic and social power trumps ideals, which is why the Siyam remain dominant.

For our purposes, these affiliations are important in that those affiliated with more traditional *nikāya* may maintain more conservative points of view. This is somewhat consistent with the data, but the difference is marginal at best (see figures 4 and 5). Monastic informants from the Siyam *nikāya* were much more inflexible as to their views about vegetarianism than monks who hailed from the Amarapura *nikāya*. For example, the Amarapura *nikāya* monks at Temple C were not in favour of vegetarianism among monks, but they did seem to agree that it might be a necessary activity for the laity. The Siyam *nikāya* monastics, on the other hand, were largely indifferent to vegetarianism, and this was the case whether one was a monk or a layperson. This is a minimal difference, but a difference nonetheless. Of course, it should be noted that outliers existed here, too. For example, the European monk at Temple A was Siyam *nikāya* (though, interesting questions can be raised about his caste affiliation), but he was very much in favour of vegetarianism.

Table 7: Caste affiliation

Siyam <i>nikāya</i>	Amarapura <i>nikāya</i>	Unspecified <i>nikāya</i>
6	7	3

Table 8: Preference by *nikāya*

	Pro vegetarian	Indifferent	Anti vegetarian
Siyam <i>nikāya</i>	1	4	1
Amarapura <i>nikāya</i>	1	6	0
Unspecified <i>nikāya</i>	3	0	0

It is plausible to conclude that these less traditional branches of the *saṅgha* were more open to absorbing new ideas popular within lay institutions. Having said that, it is also important not to overstate things here. Even though Amarapura monks tended to be more sympathetic to the vegetarian view, they were, by no means, enthusiastic supporters. It is also worth contrasting the issue of monastic caste with lay caste. Although a borderline difference existed between whether a monk was high caste or low caste and his attitude towards vegetarianism, no real difference was apparent between high caste and low caste and vegetarian attitudes among the laity. Unlike in India, of course, there is little connection between caste affiliation and diet, and this perhaps explains the marginal importance of caste both in respect to monastics and the laity.

(b) Negative Attitudes to Vegetarianism in the Temples

In the following discussion, I examine the different attitudes that monks had regarding whether vegetarianism constituted a good deed in Buddhism. Note that not all of the monks maintained a negative attitude in every sense of the word. Some believed that vegetarianism couldn't be motivated from moral ends alone, but, instead, that they could only arise from prudential motives. Nonetheless, this constitutes a negative outlook from my point of view insofar as they did not believe that vegetarianism could be understood in moral terms. They were not in favour of ethical vegetarianism.

i. Temple A (Siyam nikāya)

Temple A was a temple of some reputation, located in central Colombo. Many of the laypeople interviewed in the previous chapter had some affiliations with this temple: for example, the elder brother of Nawanga (not interviewed, but who had the Ram Bahadur Bomjan poster) used to work as a lay attendant at the temple. We made contact with the temple in this fashion. The *nāyaka* at Temple A maintained the view that vegetarianism is merely an optional activity for the pious Buddhist: "Generally it's not something that the Buddha has said imperatively (*niyamaya*), he hasn't said not to eat meat or fish, or to eat it [...]" (Int — 1.1, 20a) The *nāyaka* adopted the same principle outlined by Gāṇḍhāra Thera and in my discussion in Chapter 3, namely the permissibility clause. He said:

The Buddha has said '*kāppa mahansha*,' '*kāppa*' *mahansha*,' [which] means, 'If someone didn't kill on your behalf, if you don't suspect someone killed [it] on your behalf, if it's not said, [then] that '*mansha*' is a '*kāppa mansha*.' (Int — 1.1, 20a)

As a specific example, the *nāyaka* said:

So let's think that an animal has been killed, there is a fallen meat. Long ago, that was what life was like, it was a nomadic life (*vannagata jīvitaya*) — it's not like that today. So that kind of meat [...], you know for certain it wasn't for you. (Int — 1.1, 1b)

The *nāyaka* noted that, in the Buddha's day, and surely today, monks looked out to make sure that the meat they received had not been slaughtered with them in mind (c.f. Int — 1.1, 5b). The *nāyaka* of Temple A was, therefore, quite sure that vegetarianism had no moral

place within the Buddhist ethical schema. It was entirely an optional activity within the *saṅgha*.

We interviewed two other monks at this temple, one of whom was strongly in favour of ethical vegetarianism. He will be discussed later on (see p. 244) in the section on pro-vegetarian monks. The other monk at the temple was a young monk who was highly literate and well versed in the *sutta* literature. He sincerely hoped to become a forest renunciate and his dietary decisions were largely based around this objective — see Chapter 2 for details about forest renunciation in the Pāli canon (see p. 58); also note that Carrithers has discussed forest renunciation in Sri Lanka at length in his own ethnography (1983).

The monk relayed that, when he was younger, he avoided eating fish. This was not, he says, because he thought he would get bad merit, but rather because of the smell that fish had — he had an “aversion” (*pilihulak*) to that smell. (Int — 1.3, 1b) Eventually, he stopped eating meat as well and became a vegetarian. He persisted in this lifestyle for a while only to abandon vegetarianism when he decided he needed to prepare for forest renunciation: “If I have something like that [i.e. meat and fish], the nutrition that I need, the strength, for my existence [as a recluse] then that is something I need to have.” (Int — 1.3, 15) The monk observed that he needed to do whatever was necessary to get to “the other shore of existence” — i.e. Nibbāna. Having the strength to eradicate defilements (*kileṣa*) was paramount for him, but he did not view meat eating as itself defilement producing.

When asked whether Buddhism encourages vegetarianism, the monk answered that the Buddha’s teaching condones animal killing but observed, as other monks did, that the Buddha allowed for meat to be eaten under the right conditions. (Int — 1.3, 20d) The key problem with receiving food from the laity was that it caused the production of defilements but only in cases where a monk craved a particular food: “If we think that is meat and fish with a desiring thought, with a lustful thought, if you take it with a greedy thought, that is also wrong, because it causes defilements.” (Int — 1.3, 5e)

The important point for this monk was that food should be taken with a neutral attitude, without craving. What the nature of that food is, however, does not particularly matter. Moreover, sometimes meat and fish are absolutely necessary because they provide the strength necessary to engage in proper dhammic activities such as renunciation. For these reasons, this monk cannot be regarded as someone who favoured ethical vegetarianism. He was not, however, hostile to ethical vegetarianism, it just wasn’t entailed by the Buddha’s teaching and therefore was not particularly relevant for him.

ii. Temple B (Amarapura nikāya)

The *nāyaka* at Temple B, which was practically a hermitage in the Kēgalle district, had a similar disposition to the *nāyaka* at the Colombo temple. As a preliminary note, I point out that the *nāyaka* here is a professor at a large secular university in Kandy.^{CXCV} He is also responsible for running the education programme at the *pireveṇa* (monastic university) that I dub Temple C. He is, in this regard, an important figure within the wider Kēgalle district, and wielded considerable influence over religious affairs in the whole area. This particular temple was a temple occasionally frequented by some of the Kēgalle informants though they mainly went to the temple attached to the *pireveṇa* (to be discussed next, p. 244). The *nāyaka* maintained the following view:

At the end [of the Buddha life] (*antimatha vātavadi*) when he was attaining parinibbāna someone asked him a [that?] question and the Buddha answered like this, ‘<As a hard and fast rule> [in English], it is not accepted. (Int — 2.1, 5c)

In other words, vegetarianism was not made mandatory by the Buddha, and, as with the *nāyaka* at Temple A above, this *nāyaka* also referred to the permissibility clause. He did, however, provide a slightly different explanation from the one given by the other *nāyaka*:

Meat was taken with permission (*anumathaka mas aragena tiyannava*) — *trikoṭṭ ipalisudhiman*, *trikoṭṭ i* — *trikoṭṭ i* means <three corners> [in English]. *Palisudh* means ‘clean’ [...] The *trikoṭṭ i* is *tita-sutha-mutha*, which means, if the idea that this animal was killed because of you doesn’t come to your mind, if you didn’t hear from someone that this animal was killed for that *dāna* or for someone, or for some reason or another this animal was killed for me [...] if you can’t do it without any doubt, then it is okay to use that flesh. (Int — 2.1, 10c).

Not only does this fact cast doubt upon vegetarianism as a necessary activity, the *nāyaka* also noted that the Buddha explicitly rejected vegetarianism in his dealings with Devadatta:

Devadatta asked the Buddha for five requisites; one of the requirements was [to] remove yourself from meat and fish for the duration of your life. [The Buddha] did not give permission (*anuṭ mathaka nā*). (Int — 2.1, 1d)

The *nāyaka* was, therefore, implicitly critical of vegetarianism as a pious activity. But he also maintained a position that, at the same time, complicated this outlook. When asked what he thought about laity who give only vegetarian food during *dānē*, he stated: “They are people who have an understanding of the *Dhamma* (*dhamma hangimak tiyanna ayya*). (Int — 2.1, 15b) This statement certainly casts vegetarianism in a positive light, and also implies that such a diet is in accordance with Buddhist doctrine. He even added: “The other thing is <they are truly following the principle of non-violence>.” (ibid)

This confusing situation where the *nāyaka* approved of vegetarianism from a Buddhist perspective and, at the same time, disapproved of it can be explained in the following way: the *nāyaka* believed that vegetarianism is not mandatory for the monks even if it is a proper realisation of the principle of non-violence. This is because the Buddha stipulated that they are permitted to eat meat. But that stipulation only applies to monks, not to laypeople. Laypeople, in some ways, have a moral burden to enforce vegetarianism, and doing so is a better expression of the first precept — for them. I consider the discord between the recommended diet of the *saṅgha* and the dietary expectations of the laity further when I speak about Temple C (see p. 245).

Finally, the *nāyaka* believed that vegetarianism would probably be more popular were it not for the fact that people are unduly wary of such a diet because they believe it to be unhealthy:

What happened is that there is medical knowledge [...] that is to say, about your health. They say [the doctors], ‘You need protein, you need this, you need that, so eat meat, eat fish,’ they say. That is the influence under which most people refer to. But if you ask them, the power of the crowd (*rodai shakthiya*) will tell them that it is not good for them. (Int — 2.1, 20b)

The deputy monk of Temple B held similar views to the *nāyaka* as far as his attitude towards ethical vegetarianism was concerned. When asked whether he believed that Buddhism promotes vegetarianism, he answered: “There’s nothing like that.” (Int — 2.2, 15d) His chief concern was over the fact that a monk should accept food without any sense of preference: “[In the *Buddha dhamma*, what is desired for people’s bodies (*manusiyage sharīraya kamatak...*), [in regards to *dhamma*] food and meat and fish is not to be decided.” (Int — 2.2, 20d)

A problem arises, therefore, regarding desire in vegetarianism. To clarify this otherwise opaque point, the monk discussed the idea that one should see the body as

impermanent, and that food should not be discriminated about because it should be considered only as a fuel:

The Buddha said, 'Protect all creatures,' (Pāli: '*sabba sattha arakshaka*'), 'protect all animals/creatures,' (Sinhala: '*siya/ u satthu arakshāva*'), [but] having said that [it's not about] this and that taste. There's nothing like that. Food is necessary for the survival of the human race." (Int — 2.2, 1e)

Note that the idea that food should be looked at as a fuel was a point implicitly adopted by the young layperson Chamika. The threat of craving after food is, therefore, an issue and this can apply to vegetarian monks as much as meat eating monks. To begin with, if the monk were motivated out of a strong sense of dietary discrimination, then it would constitute a problem.

But there are further problems for the monastic vegetarian. In particular, a vegetarian faces a number of medical challenges:

Now let's say somebody tells a monk — a doctor — 'For this monk's ailment he must take liver,' it's a problem! Either the monk accepts it or rejects it. So there are there are these sorts of problems. (Int - 2.2, 5e)

Evidently some occasions arise where thoroughgoing vegetarianism is impossible. This also brings to mind objections considered by the unrecorded monk at Temple A that I mention previously: he argued against vegetarianism in the same way — that some medicines depend on the death of animals.

Finally, the deputy monk acknowledged, in unison with the other monks, that the Buddha allowed the consumption of meat. He quickly followed this with the observation that Devadatta's endorsement of mandatory vegetarianism was rejected by the Buddha (Int — 2.2, 15d). Like the *nāyaka*, he was clear that vegetarianism could not be legitimately construed as a morally necessary diet. But he appeared to be somewhat torn on this point. He was aware, for example, that the eating of animals does do animals harm:

An animal that has a long time to live is something we eat in one meal — not for a life time! We kill it for that meal. Let's think about a cow, let's say that his life time is five years — we kill him before that time, so that's where the problem is. (Int — 2.2, 1f)

The deputy monk, nonetheless, followed this comment with the observation that good Buddhists could still be meat eaters even in spite of these observations. In fact, I ultimately determined that the deputy monk was himself a vegetarian, but his decision to become a vegetarian was principally motivated out of prudential health concerns:

So let's think, when we eat an animal it's possible that [the] animal had an illness, a {problem} with the body, so if we use that it's possible that additional ailments will be created for us [...] The best thing is vegetables — with meat and fish you can't tell for sure [whether there are germs]. (Int — 2.2, 10b)

Meat can lead to health complications if, for example, the animal that died carried a disease. Vegetarianism was usually defended on these or similar grounds — i.e. prudence born from health concerns.

The deputy did not take eggs either, but, in this instance, it seemed to be motivated out of concern for the animal's well being. He argued that we could always tell whether an egg was fertilised or not, and that it would be immoral to harm a being that had a life (Int — 2.2, 20b). We should not, however, think that this offers a pathway into vegetarianism. The monk's worry was that he might inadvertently kill a still-living embryo by consuming it. He was not worried about supporting industries that harmed the creature from which the egg was taken, however.

iii. Temple C (Amarapura nikāya)

Temple C is connected to Temple B in that Temple C, as I already mention, is a monastic university and the *nāyaka* from Temple B is responsible for the education programme there. Temple C can, therefore, be better described as a *pireveṇa* or monastic university, although it naturally had a proper temple attached to it, and members of the Kēgalle laity whom we interviewed frequented it. It was, in fact, their main temple.

None of the four monks we interviewed endorsed vegetarianism from a moral standpoint, and all agreed that meat eating was justifiable from a monastic perspective. Although four monks were interviewed, I consider only three of the monks here, and consider

only a portion of their interview answers (the other monk is included in the figures above, however).

Because this temple is actually a monastic university, a wide range of different monks study there. One of these monks is quite young, perhaps in his late teens. At the time of research he had probably not yet received the higher ordination. This young monk was not even aware of any moral issues attached to the eating of meat whatsoever. For him, vegetarianism was simply an arbitrary decision constricted only by whether it was medically feasible, something that he believed was, in fact, the case:

Even if you take a part of vegetables [...] the necessary amounts of vitamins are received. There are vegetarians. They are alive, right? They're not dead. So if you are a vegetarian it's okay (*kamak nā*). (Int — 3.1, 15a)

For him, vegetarianism was perfectly acceptable in the sense that it *is* possible, and this is how he interpreted the question. Another young monk (of similar age) interpreted the question more in the manner that it was intended. He denied the possibility that vegetarianism was encouraged in Buddhism, saying: “No, the Buddha hasn't allowed that (*anumathakarala nā*).” (Int — 3.2, 20a) Consistent with the other monks, he cited the case of Devadatta, and noted that the Buddha had explicitly allowed meat to be consumed. He added:

By allowing the consumption of meat and fish there is no demerit (*pav*) because what is given for the offering at a *dāna* is what we accept, it's only for a *dāna*. (Int — 3.2, 1b)

When asked whether a connection exists between the first precept and the need for vegetarianism, the monk answered:

The Buddha said, '*cetanā bhikave, kāmmun vadave*' ('Intention, monks, is action') — mainly what was preached, the important part of what was preached, is [about] our thoughts: when we eat our thoughts are not about killing an animal. (Int — 3.2, 10b)

The monk was, therefore, certain that no harm was done in eating flesh because the monk's intention was not to do the animal any harm. Intention plays a critical role. This is an important point. From the monastic perspective, no harm is being done, because the monks

are apart from the world: they are not involved in killing animals, nor are they involved in buying animal flesh at market. They are merely passive recipients of meat that is offered to them. They do not see themselves as having a causal influence over what the laity do, except to the extent that they want to avoid the laity killing of animals for them, because this does imply some level of causal connection.

To this extent, the question of whether eating animals is immoral is not a question for the monks; it is, rather, a lay question. To illustrate this point, I consider some other of the monks' comments. When further challenged on the connection between animal slaughter and eating animals, one monk said: "That's something that happens with society." (Int — 3.2, 20b). It is a problem that occurs in society, but the monastery is precisely thought of as not being in society — it is, and ought to be, apart from society. Another monk interrupted to add:

That depends on who is looking at it, if you are looking at the monks' side or the givers' side. From the givers' side it is a difficulty, but from the monks' side it is not a difficulty. The side that it has to develop on is the givers' side. (Int — 3.2, 5c)

Again, the moral impetus to be vegetarian is a lay problem, not necessarily a monastic problem.

These comments relate directly to a point implied by the *nāyaka* at Temple B. That *nāyaka* noted that laypeople do good when they give only vegetarian food, but that monks are not obliged to eat only vegetarian food. This shows a split between the laity and the monastery on moral grounds — the role of the *saṅgha* is simply to maintain decorum and provide the conditions by which Nibbāna can be realised. There is a sense, then, that the monastery is a place of moral neutrality. Morality is a domain dictated by the laypeople, and their behaviour determines the behaviour of the monastics. The young monk at Temple C made the same point: he was clear that it is a problem for the laypeople where their meat is supplied. This is not a problem for the monastics. In this way, the question of what a morally correct diet constitutes something that they cannot control: it is something that the laity controls exclusively. This way of separating lay responsibilities from monastic responsibilities partly characterises Buddhist Ethics more generally — it is an ethic that allows for flexibility and is sensitive to different situations.

Interestingly, the nominal *nāyaka* of Temple C claimed that the majority of the people who gave *dānē* to the temple typically only supplied vegetarian food anyway:

About 80% of the people give vegetarian *dānē*. [...] The reason is that {there is a lack} of money. [...] For a lot of people, it is given because they are labourers and they eat mostly vegetables. (Int — 3.3, 15a)

Because the area was relatively poor, people mainly supplied vegetarian dishes (being that meat is expensive). In fact, I was told repeatedly and independently that a lot of people in the Kēgalle district are in the habit of eating only vegetarian food for exactly this reason; this seemed to be the case according to my own observations. Note that this high number of vegetarian *dāyaka* does not imply a large number of pious lay Buddhists: if given the opportunity, these *dāyaka* would supply meat dishes, only that doing so is uneconomical. After all, as I establish in Chapter 5, supplying meat at *dāna* ceremonies is considered very prestigious, and is, therefore, popular, regardless of what your religious scruples happen to be.

One key observation is, then, that many monks are of the opinion that they have little influence over what sorts of foods should be supplied by the laity. But this could merely be a result of how monks wish to be perceived, not how they always behave. For example, Buddhika — one of the Kēgalle informants — suggested that temples often supplied lists to laypeople that provided instructions as to what they should or should not bring to a *dāna* (Int — 8.5, 20a). When asked about this, As mentioned, Nawanga insisted that this was highly irregular, even though Buddhika viewed it as ordinary. It is plausible that, outside of Colombo, in poorer areas of Sri Lanka, temples supply laity with food lists as a guide, not necessarily as a way to transmit food preferences. This certainly seems plausible given that the list supplied by the Māligāva is ostensibly to ensure that laypeople do not supply food that violates monastic protocol. In short, list giving is a regulatory procedure designed to ensure compliance with monastic norms, and is not a way to satisfy the desires of the clergy.

iv) Temple F (Siyam nikāya)

Temple F is the final temple of relevance here. The majority of the Colombo lay informants I mention in Chapter 5 frequent this temple. The *nāyaka* of this temple is a well-respected figure, and the laity with whom I mixed hold him in extremely high regard.

The view espoused at this temple was roughly the same as the view already espoused at other temples, so I do not labour the point. All three monks whom we interviewed agreed that vegetarianism was not a monastic requirement, nor was it even implied. The *nāyaka*, for example, repeated the standard observation that Devadatta's request to make the *saṅgha* vegetarian was denied. (Int — 5.1, 5b) None suggested any moral implication to food

consumption but, as we encounter in a previous section, there was general agreement that vegetarianism might be motivated from health concerns.

I outline these health considerations in more detail. The *nāyaka* observed that some families like to give vegetarian *dānē*, which he believed was acceptable, and that this was possible because there are now soya substitutes for meat (Int — 5.1, 20a). When asked why people might give soya, he replied:

There are things such as cholesterol and heart attacks [...] because of those, problems, some people abstain from [meat and fish]. [...] Because of that side [or ‘that reason’], people don’t eat [meat and fish]. (Int — 5.1, 5b)

The deputy monk took the opposite view. He believed that vegetarianism was intrinsically problematic, because meat was needed to cure some diseases and illnesses:

Because of some diseases meat [eating] is necessary for people. At those times, the Buddha hasn’t prohibited it, [and] for some things it becomes necessary, right? Depending on your illness you might need it (*roga annuva avaṣ ya venneva*). When you have fertility (*sāra*) problems, you are told to eat meat, fish and eggs. So it’s okay to eat it. (Int — 5.2, 5b)

Opinion is divided, then, as to whether vegetarianism is warranted from a health perspective. On the one hand, it is accepted that vegetarianism can be advantageous sometimes, such as when it is used to control cholesterol. But, on the other hand, it is also thought that meat is necessary to resolve certain medical conditions. The example was someone experiencing fertility problems. This view, of course, echoes comments already made by other monks, particularly the monk at Temple A and the deputy monk at Temple C. The notion that meat has curative properties is connected, I believe, to perceived ayurvedic properties that meat is thought to have; this in no way stems from Western medical advice, although people sometimes confuse ayurvedic claims with Western medical claims. Importantly, this again highlights the fact that many monks see the question of vegetarianism only in a prudential health-orientated light, not in an ethical light.

(c) Positive Attitudes to Vegetarianism in the Temples

In the previous section, I suggest that vegetarianism is widely held to be, first of all, an optional monastic activity, but, further, that the only rational way to justify vegetarianism is from prudential health-orientated motivations. For most of the clergy I interviewed, ethical vegetarianism was itself viewed as a rational impossibility, at least from a Buddhist point of view. It should be said, however, that a few of these monks did dabble with the idea that ethical vegetarianism was a possibility — in the end, however, they seemed more strongly persuaded that it was not.

Another important observation is that this stance was generally perceived to hold only for the monks themselves. A number of monks either implicitly or explicitly stated that ethical vegetarianism was a rational possibility for the laity — and only the laity. This is naturally interesting because it suggests that the *saṅgha* perceives itself as being divested of moral responsibility; or, perhaps, that it is not morally appropriate to engage in political affairs and that such an engagement would outweigh the virtues of vegetarianism — this issue will be addressed more later in the chapter (see p. 264).

Not all of the clergy that I studied were so inclined to agree with this view, however. One monk seemed completely at odds with the standard view insofar as he believed that vegetarianism ought to be the nominal position, and, moreover, that it was moral matter rather than a matter of pure prudence. A second monk, although he did not completely contest the standard view, was also much more positive in his attitude towards ethical vegetarianism. Although health factors played a role in his appraisal, a significant factor for him was the ethical implication entailed by consuming meat.

i) Temple D (Unknown nikāya)

The monk at Temple 4 is the *nāyaka* of a temple in Kurunegala, but he spends a significant amount of time at a temple in Kandy due to the fact that he is an official at the Daladā Māligāva. The interview took place at his Kandy temple (see Chapter 5 for more details about this monk in connection to the Māligāva, pp. 209-211). As with Temple A, we made contact with this temple through some of the Kēgalle informants. It is interesting to note that the Kēgalle informants were some of the most strident meat eaters, but the monk to whom they pledged the most allegiance was actually quite in favour of vegetarianism.

As I say above, although the monk was not entirely unorthodox in his outlook, he differed from the other monks in that, when asked whether a Buddhist should be a vegetarian, he answered in the affirmative. This was the case even though the monk accepted that he himself was not a vegetarian. (Int — 4.1, 15c) He stated, for example, that he ate dried fish. However, his reasons for why he believed that vegetarianism was good were somewhat unclear. As with the other monks, his answer seemed to be connected to the health benefits

attached to vegetarianism: "I think so [that Buddhists should be vegetarians], because the nutrients (*porsha bhagatiya*) that you get from meat come from vegetables [to begin with]." (Int — 4.1, 5f) It is, by now, very telling that, among monks, vegetarianism is widely considered a lifestyle choice motivated from health concerns.

But the *nāyaka* differed from the others in some other important respects. To begin with, he claimed that he would not allow cow flesh near or in his temple: "What I am strongly opposed to is bringing things like cow flesh. I have said not to bring it anywhere near the temple." (Int — 4.1, 20d) Banning certain types of flesh from the temple grounds is certainly unorthodox, at least in comparison to the other monks studied, insofar as it is unusual to stipulate to the laity what is or is not allowed on the monastery grounds. The monk similarly stated that he would not allow animals to be harmed on the monastery grounds, even if they were pests (he mentioned porcupines as an example: he explained that porcupines habitually eat the coconuts in the temple yard). (Int — 4.1, 1e)

The monk also believed that vegetarians tend to be treated better by animals. This is in keeping with the canonical sources. In Chapter 2, I observe that Pāli sources warn monks not to harm animals lest they be harmed in turn. Similarly, monks who avoided killing animals were often protected or even saved by them. The *nāyaka* of Temple D seemed to accept these arguments, because he told the following story:

One day, soon after the passing of [a named monk] [I had this experience]: to make an {inaudible} we had to cut a small tree in the forest. [There was] Saratuvi, Vijayasingha Ayya, and Nilamai and me. Nilamai was the one who cut the tree, Saratuvi and Vijayasingha Ayya were clearing the leaves. Nalamai is a person who doesn't even eat Maldivian fish (*umbalakaḍa*). After the tree was cut, I came this way. I felt a great coldness over my foot — a python (*pollanga*) was going over my foot. I called Nilamai and I told him about it (*nilamai ong keale*).^{cxcvi} Over Nilamai and my feet! I have never done any harm (*mama kavadākwak hāniyak karana nā*). (Int — 4.1, 5e)

According to the monk, he and the Nilamai were left alone by the snake because they exercised non-violence: the monk because "he never harmed an animal" and Nilamai because of his intense vegetarianism. This suggests that, for this monk, vegetarianism can enter the ethical domain: by being a vegetarian Nilamai was good, and in doing good he was repaid in kind. As for the monk, he was sure that he would never be harmed by an animal because of his non-violent behaviour towards animals:

On any night I will go without any light [i.e. that is how confident he is that he won't be attacked by an animal]. I've never harmed an animal or a serpent. I have a certainty of belief that this is because I don't kill animals. I will not even kill an ant. (Int — 4.1, 15e)

For these reasons, it seemed that the monk at Temple D differed from the other clergymen insofar as he had an unusually positive disposition towards animals and vegetarianism. First of all, he believed that all Buddhists should be vegetarians (albeit for health reasons). Second of all, he regarded vegetarianism as being a moral concern, an idea that many of the other monks challenged. This moral awareness was evident in light of his comments about Nilamai: Nilamai was a vegetarian, and because of that good deed and moral practice, he was able to avoid being attacked by animals.

ii) Temple A (Siyam nikāya)

Another monk sympathetic to ethical vegetarianism was the European monk (*suddha hāmuduruwa*) from Temple A. Note these factors preliminarily: First of all, this monk was clear that he had not been affiliated with the temple for long, and he suggested that he was somewhat nomadic in his association with monasteries. He had been inducted into the *saṅgha* in Sri Lanka when he was a teenager. Since then, he had moved back and forth between Sri Lanka and England. This is important to note because the monk is an unusual case on account of his exotic background. The possibility that he may have been influenced by liberal ideas current in the West cannot be overlooked. For example, ethical vegetarianism has a more public face in the West than it does in Sri Lanka.

In any case, it is clear that the European monk was very much in favour of ethical vegetarianism. Unlike the monks already discussed, he was quite explicit that his decision to become a vegetarian was not for medical or health reasons. His reasons were, he said, to do with his convictions, and those convictions in turn stemmed from his Buddhism: "It's connected with... *dhmma*, yes. The teachings of Truth. I personally don't feel that it's necessary nowadays to consume meat or fish." (Int — 1.2, 20a) Apart from it being unnecessary, he also found it, in some sense, disgusting: "The reason I don't consume the eggs which are taken before [fertilisation] is because I find it, personally, repugnant, and consumption of flesh or eggs I find personally repugnant." (Int — 1.2, 20b)

The monk was a vegetarian, not a vegan, and he freely admitted that he ate dairy products. He did, however, have potential worries about dairy, too: "My objection to dairy products would be in connection with the exploitation of animals, you know." (Int — 1.2, 1c) The fact that the monk was aware of issues concerning animal exploitation and factory farming sets him somewhat apart from the other monks — and perhaps even most of the

laity, with the exclusion of Charuni, who had seen a video exposé on factory-farming conditions.

Another difference between this monk and the other monks was that he had strong feelings about whether laypeople should offer meat and fish at *dānē*. Most other monks were largely indifferent to what the laity offered; a few believed that the particularly pious would offer vegetarian food (not, necessarily, that they *ought* to offer it, though). The European monk, however, thought that the offering of meat was now largely obsolete:

I think, nowadays [that it is] somewhat unnecessary for people to be offering meat, fish and eggs to monks when there are so many alternative food sources. (Int — 1.2, 10d)

But he was in agreement with other monks in that he thought that the possibility of widespread change in people's eating habits could only be realised through the laity, and that the monastic order could have little effect. (Int — 1.2, 20d) As mentioned, the monk believed that Buddhism encouraged vegetarianism, and he was quite clear about this towards the end of the interview:

The entire teachings and their emphasis on harmlessness, by definition, encourage the extension from the involvement in any part of the causing of suffering to beings [interrupts himself] do you understand what I am saying? (Int — 1.2, 10e)

The point is clear: the principle of non-violence implies that we should boycott violent institutions. This monk was the only monk, however, who made an explicit connection between the first precept and vegetarianism. This stands in contrast to the lay informants: a large number believed that the first precept naturally implies vegetarianism. This difference alone is telling: monks are almost completely unwilling to accept a connection between the first precept and the boycott of meat products.

(d) Summary Observations

In this section, I examine in some detail the views expressed by several monks at several different monastic institutions. A number of important findings come to light. First, the monks almost uniformly rejected the notion that vegetarianism is, in any sense, mandated by the Buddha's ethical teachings. For the most part, the only way that they could imagine vegetarianism as being justified was on prudential health-orientated grounds. Ethical

vegetarianism was, for them, *ipso facto* implausible, at least from a religious point of view. I call this rejection of vegetarianism the standard view.

Second of all, it is increasingly apparent that at least some of the monks regarded the question of vegetarianism as being a concern only for the laity. For these monks, the standard view held for the clergy, but not necessarily for the laity. Moral responsibility over diet was, therefore, a societal matter, and not a problem for those who had renounced society. In this vein, it is possible that monks might be aware that diet practices affect animals in harmful ways, but, from their perspective, the boycotting of foods is a political act and is therefore a matter of social responsibility. Social and political activism is something that many monks (but, famously, not all of them) purposefully avoid.^{cxcvii}

Some monks defied both of these points. These outlier monks viewed the question of vegetarianism as being relevant for the clergy, and something that ought to be considered a pious activity. For them, the principle of non-violence had some bearing on diet. The European monk was most explicit about this, but the *nāyaka* at Temple D also seemed to believe that vegetarianism had certain moral virtues as revealed by his dealings with the vegetarian Nilamai. Both of the pro-vegetarian monks endorsed vegetarianism and recommended it for Buddhists, though they appeared to do this for roughly different reasons. This fact alone illustrates how these monks were unique among their co-brethren.

Perhaps, however, the *nāyaka* from Temple D is a complicated case. He may not be recognised as an exemplar of a pro-vegetarian Buddhist monk, given the fact that, first, he himself was not a vegetarian, and second, his primary reason for being a vegetarian was largely prudential (again, he favoured vegetarianism for health reasons). He considered vegetarianism in a very good light, but it could be argued that, given the facts of this case, it is not enough to consider him a true proponent of ethical vegetarianism. Similarly, the European monk could be considered an outlier case in light of his unusual background.

In the next several sections, I consider two more monks who both appear to endorse vegetarianism in a strong way, indeed, in a way comparable to the European monk's stance. The first monk I look at is the *nāyaka* of a temple in the Kataragama *dewalaya* precinct. The *buddha ge* at his temple required only vegetarian offerings. This strongly implies that he is a pro-vegetarian Buddhist who bucks against the standard view already described. The second case is a monk who ran a cow protection society in Colombo. Of all the monks interviewed — excepting the European monk — he was the most studiously pro-vegetarian and pro-animal. In that regard he was very much an outlier.

III – The *buddha-ge* at the Temple in Kataragama

The Kataragama *dewalaya* is an important pilgrimage site for both Sinhala and Tamil Sri Lankans. The Kataragama area is thought to be the home of the god Kataragama — the name of the region and the name of the god are identical. Kataragama is a Sinhala name

given to the Hindu deity otherwise known as Skanda. Kataragama/Skanda is the son of Śiva. He is considered a violent and pugnacious deity by the Sinhala and Tamil devotees who worship him. But it is because of this violent attitude that he is considered powerful. In Chapter 4, I discuss the fact that Kataragama is offered vegetarian food, and sometimes also meats.

Situated near the Kataragama *dewalaya* area is a large *stūpa* called Kiri Vehera. In accordance with ritual custom, Sinhala Buddhist Kataragama devotees arrive at this *stūpa* prior to their evening appointment at the Kataragama temple. The *stūpa* must be circumambulated prior to attending the Kataragama temple, because the Buddha, of course, stands above Kataragama in terms of importance: from a Sinhala Buddhist perspective, Kataragama is himself a Buddhist who worships the Buddha, but, due to his violent nature, he is merely flawed in his Buddhist practice.

Near the Kiri Vehera *stūpa* is a small glass *buddha-ge* — an image house containing a Buddha statue (*buddha-pillamaya*). It is an extremely non-traditional *buddha-ge* in its modern design (see, Image 4, p. 336). No other *buddha-ge* I have encountered in Sri Lanka has been made entirely of glass; they are almost all of a specific traditional design where the image inside is obscured by a set of walls. The reason for this obscuration is probably because it helps facilitate a sense of sacredness to the Buddha's space. But this concealment is not the case for this *buddha-ge*. The most important non-traditional feature of this *buddha-ge*, however, is the fact that *dāyaka* are explicitly instructed to only provide vegetarian food during *buddha-pūjā* ceremonies. A sign printed on the glass outside the *buddha-ge* bears the following instructions:

In this Buddha *pūjā* house please deposit inside all vegetarian offerings.

(This place is entirely devoid [of] meat, fish, salted fish, eggs, Maldiv fish).

You ought to kindly consider this — the Temple Authorities.^{CXCviii}

The sign clearly states that meat and fish are not allowed inside the *buddha-ge*. It is particularly stringent in that Maldiv fish or salted fish are not permitted either, and, as indicated in Chapter 5, many Sinhala Buddhists regard vegetarians who abstain from these products as being particularly pious because, for many, Maldiv fish flakes are treated as a spice rather than an animal product.

That the temple makes a public statement directing *dāyaka* to only provide vegetarian food is highly irregular in the context of procedures at other temples. As is evident from the interview data, monks universally refrained from telling laity what sorts of foods to supply —

though it should be accepted that, according to Buddhika the carpenter, this practice may not be as universal as we would necessarily expect. Generally, however, there is at least some assumption that monks would not explicitly air their desires publicly. Even vegetarian monks would not command laity to refrain from supplying meat. All monks agreed that a vegetarian monk could refuse meat when and if it were offered, but it was implied that monks oughtn't to tell a *dāyaka* in advance not to bring flesh foods (c.f. Appendix 3). Consequently, the *buddha-ge* at the Kataragama Kiri Vehera is an oddity insofar as it offers public instructions on what to offer during a *buddha-pūjā*. Its forthright stance concerning vegetarianism is an anomaly, to say the least.

The *nāyaka* of the temple was on hand to discuss the matter.^{CXCIX} He stated that the *buddha-ge* enforces mandatory vegetarian offerings because the Buddha encourages you not to kill. For this reason the *Buddha ge* allows only vegetarian food in order to keep with that spirit. It is noteworthy that, along with the European monk and — perhaps — the *nāyaka* at Temple D, this was one of the few cases among the clergy where a clear connection was made between the first precept and the ethics of diet. Furthermore, the *nāyaka* also mentioned that there was some dispute over whether the Buddha himself was a vegetarian: he stated that the Buddha may have eaten meat as his last meal, but that some people say he only ate truffles (*hatthu vargayak*). He believed the matter to be unsettled. In saying this, he implied that a further reason to maintain a vegetarian *buddha-ge* was in case the Buddha was, in fact, a *bona fide* vegetarian (see Chapter 3 for a full examination of the Buddha's last meal and diet).

The monk further confirmed his positive disposition towards vegetarianism by mentioning, again, certain prudential advantages of vegetarianism. As with the other monks, he believed that vegetarianism conferred health advantages. The *nāyaka* stated that a text called (something like) the 108 *gāthas* was a canonical text, and that it listed all the disadvantages of eating meat. I could, unfortunately, find no further information about the text. It is almost certainly para-canonical, as I do not believe that anything within the canonical literature matches this description. This is particularly true in light of the canon's ambivalent attitude towards vegetarianism (as I discuss in Chapter 3). The only text that seems remotely similar is the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, and that, of course, is a Mahāyāna text.

In spite of these positive remarks, the *nāyaka* did have certain reservations about ethical vegetarianism. He noted that it was an optional activity, and could not be considered mandatory. But he worried about what impact such a diet would have ethically. He observed that a person might be a vegetarian their whole life and thus do good, but in their next life, they might return to being a prolific meat eater. Naturally, this would reverse the good deeds done previously. In this respect, he maintained a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards vegetarianism from an ethical point of view, even if he believed that it was ultimately consistent with the first precept and the spirit of Buddhism.

In some ways, the *nāyaka* at the Kataragama temple was quite modern in his outlook. His *buddha-ge* was built in a contemporary architectural style, and he believed in a connection between the first precept and vegetarianism, something that is more consistent with the modern Protestant Buddhist movement than traditional Buddhist monasticism (see Chapters 4 and 5). For these reasons, the Kataragama *nāyaka* can be set apart from many of the other monks studied. However, we should also consider the fact that the temple was in close proximity to the Kataragama *dewalaya*. I note that, as I discuss in Chapter 4, Kataragama *deva* is offered vegetarian food on account of his being a well-respected deity — though, of course, as a malevolent deity, he also craves flesh foods. Possibly, given that the Buddha is to be worshipped prior to the devotee approaching the Kataragama shrine, it would be unusual for the Buddha to be given (impure) meat foods while Kataragama is given (pure) vegetarian food, even if this is the convention during home *buddha-pūjā*.

The *buddha-pūjā* in the Kataragama precinct may, therefore, obey different rules compared to ordinary *buddha-pūjā* activities. As I mention in the previous chapter, laypeople were often worried about appearing stingy by giving only vegetarian food. These worries are no longer relevant when a religious competition exists between the Buddha and the Kataragama *deva*. The Buddha must get the best, which, in this context, means “the most morally pure” — not “what is the most tasty”. The context determines a different outcome. This of course also indicates just how hinduised this particular religious space is. The Kataragama *dewalaya* is dominated by Hindu values and this might influence the practices associated even with the Buddhist temples in the vicinity.

Because of this latter explanation, and because the *nāyaka* held reservations about ethical vegetarianism, we may consider the Kiri Vehera an unusual case. It remains unclear as to how serious the *nāyaka* took his vegetarian cause. In any case, he was much less stringent in his outlook than the next monk I consider who was much more politically inclined.

IV – The Organisation for the Accumulation of Life

Another key example of a monastic who maintained a pro-vegetarian position is the monk who ran a pro-vegetarian animal welfare organisation called *Sangviḍānaye Panivuḍayaki* or *The Organisation for the Accumulation of Life*. The organisation is run from a building that overlooks a canal in a central Colombo suburb. The building backs onto a Hindu *kovil*. The organisation also doubles as an education facility for underprivileged children. In general, the monk who ran the organisation was involved in a number of extracurricular monastic community-orientated activities. In his outlook, this monk was closer to the European monk than the Kataragama *nāyaka* in that he had no qualms about recommending vegetarianism as an ethically pure activity. Indeed, he regarded it as practically essential.

He went beyond vegetarianism and recommended a wider program of animal protectionism. In particular, this monk helped to spearhead a media campaign to promote

animal welfare, especially cow welfare. Large billboards were positioned at several important road junctions throughout Colombo, most notably at Dehiwala junction and along Galle road in Wellawatta. One interesting fact about all of these billboards is that they were all based around pro-cow discourses. The cow is picked out for special treatment and a special argument is deployed: the argument contained in Chapter 4 and 5 — cows should not be harmed because they are like our mothers (see Image 5, p. 337). The Dehiwala junction sign reads:

Don't [don't] eat the milk mother's flesh (*kiri amma*).

Let's commemorate (*samaramu*) the 2600 Sri Sambuddha Anniversary (*Jayanthi*) [i.e., Birth of the Buddha] Let's avoid beef from food (*gava-mas*).

Organisation for the Accumulation of Life (Sangviḍānaye Panivuḍayaki)

[Picture inset of cows]: Let's protect (*rakimu*) cow prosperity (*sampath*), like our mothers (*ape mava vage*).^{cc}

As mentioned in Chapter 5, the word *kiri amma* refers to one's paternal grandmother and means "milk mother". The billboard's argument, therefore, plays upon a symmetry between one's grandmother and the cow. Grandmothers are owed special respect in Sinhala culture, so the analogy is a powerful one because it implies that we owe the cow the same level of respect as our own grandmother. This analogy is extended further by the text in the picture inset, which states: "Let's protect cow prosperity, like our mothers." In other words, just as our mother's nurture us and allow us to prosper, we should recognise that cows do the same. Consequently, we should protect the source of such prosperity, just as we protect and respect our own mothers and grandmothers. This argument has considerable pull in Indic culture – for example, a nearly identical argument is deployed by Gandhi in his autobiography.^{cci}

I detail this analogical argument in Chapter 5 when I consider Nihal Nelson's baila song, *Milk Mother (kiri ammā)*. The analogical argument between the cow and the grandmother is redeployed on the other billboards. A billboard that appears in Wellawatta features a monk benevolently petting a calf (see Image 6, p. 337). Evidently these analogical arguments between the cow and the grandmother have a lot of persuasive power. The other billboard reads (see overpage):

You were given the beautiful *dhamma* (*sobā dhahama*).

How can we as humans, having looked at this innocent face, see how tasty this meat is? Let's avoid beef from food.

Organisation for the Accumulation of Life [address and number supplied].^{ccii}

This billboard makes an explicit connection between Buddhism and cow protectionism. It does this in two ways: first, it features a Buddhist monk petting a cow; second, it begins with the phrase: "You were given the beautiful *dharmma*," and then states that, because of this, one should not eat cow's flesh. *The Organisation for the Accumulation of Life* therefore appears to support cow protectionism in particular. This focus on cow protectionism links back to discussions in Chapter 4 concerning cow protectionism in India (see pp. 135-139). In that chapter, I observe that cow protectionism had a foothold in Sri Lanka at least as early as the 1600s, as Knox observed that beef was outlawed in the Kandyan kingdom at that time, and that, furthermore, the insult "beef eating slaves" was applied liberally to European prisoners in the kingdom.

The media campaign orchestrated by *The Organisation for the Accumulation of Life* certainly indicates that this pro-attitude to cow protectionism has been maintained up until contemporary times. The fact that the laity and the monks often cited the killing and eating of cows as an example of an immoral diet further confirms this. As mentioned, Nawanga cited an older media campaign (possibly from the 1980s) that operated along similar lines to the billboards erected by *The Organisation for the Accumulation of Life*. I discuss the details of his comments in Chapter 5 (see pp. 186-187).^{cciii} The Rathnakāra text also regards the cow as an animal that requires special attention — indeed, Rathnakāra's book cover features the image of a number of dead cows (see Image 7, p. 338). Together, this all points towards the notion that cows feature heavily within the animal welfare movement in Sri Lanka.

In the course of our investigation, we interviewed the monk who runs this organisation. It soon became apparent that, although he was interested in improving the welfare of all animals, he paid special attention to the plight of cows. The monk explained that the stated goals of the organisation were as follows:

Our primary focus is to make the public aware of such issues [concerning animals], to stop [the public] eating meat, to drink milk and to protect the prosperity of cows. (Int — 6.1, 20c)

Although his organisation focuses on cow protectionism, this was, it appeared, merely an instrumental good for improving animal welfare more generally. But, to this end, the organisation focuses on improving cow welfare more generally. Hence he says:

We also promote the proper killing of cows (*nithiya anukula one vidihita tamai gaveyek marane godak*), like, we go to the police to take action (*polisiya gehilla* 'action' *tiyanna ēva aragenna*), we are carrying out the necessary things to stop the murdering of animals (*satthu ghathanaya*), we bring the cows [i.e., rescue them] from where they are killed and bring them to people who rear them [i.e., look after them]. (Int — 6.1, 1d)

Clearly, this monk and his organisation were active in promoting the welfare of cows.^{cciv} We can already see how this monk who runs the *Organisation for the Accumulation of Life* differed from many of the other monks whom I interviewed. His organisation was a political movement that aimed to be directly involved in animal welfare. This is at odds with the disposition of the other monks, who conceived of such matters as exclusively lay affairs.

For these other monks, monasticism entails precisely a disengagement from worldly affairs such as animal liberation and the politicking that it involves. For the monk who runs this organisation, however, this was not the case at all. Indeed, his attitude towards animal welfare was just as passionate as the attitude displayed by Nawanga the *upāsaka*, and he maintained roughly similar arguments, too. Therefore, I now consider his general attitude to the issue of animal welfare. For the monk of the *Organisation for the Accumulation of Life*, Buddhism is already deeply invested in animal welfare:

Eating the meat of another animal is not good: we love our own lives [...] — if we don't like dying, and we don't like suffering, if we don't like being beaten, if we don't like facing pain [...] the way we love our bodies is the same as every animal — only they are not able to say it. (Int — 6.1, 15a)

This, the monk added, applies to almost any type of animal: "Whether it be a fish, a wild animal, or even the worm in our stomachs — they really love their lives. We don't have the right (*āthiya*) to take away that life. The *Buddha dhamma* states that wisdom." (ibid) Speaking in this way, the monk maintained a view consistent with the extreme attitude of non-violence detailed in the Pāli canon (as laid out in Chapter 1). The canon is clear that the first precept applies even to the tiniest creature. The monk above echoed this point when he suggested that we should recognise the desires of even the worm in our stomach. Unlike many of the

other monks I discuss, this monk made a clear connection between the first precept, animal non-violence and (ultimately) vegetarianism:

Now if we protect the goodness of the precepts (*silagunadarma*) then we'll ensure a good rebirth from generation-to-generation. Otherwise, killing animals, stealing things, drinking moonshine (*kasipu*), killing people... that's it! (Int — 6.1, 20b)

It is telling that the foremost motivation for avoiding killing animals is to ensure a good rebirth. Self-interest is, therefore, an important consideration in our dealings with other creatures. Nonetheless, it is apparent that the monk was concerned about animals for their own sakes. But, just as with the other monks, self-interest is also relevant — except for this monk, self-interest is located in the domain of moral action; it is not merely concerned with health concerns.

In general, the monk who led the cow protection society was evidently preoccupied with animal welfare and, as I mentioned, this was certainly contrary to the general attitude of most of the clergy whom we interviewed. This monk maintained a completely different pro-animal, pro-vegetarian attitude. He can be ranked as the foremost animal-welfare-orientated monk, alongside the European monk. In terms of positive sentiments towards vegetarianism and animal welfarism, the monk at the Kataragama temple and the monk at Temple D rank second. But in most of these cases, it is clear that these monks were, in some sense, non-traditional in their general disposition. The European monk, of course, came from an unusual foreign background, and, therefore, may have been influenced by Western animal welfare movements; the monk at the Kataragama temple had a modern *Buddha ge* and, unlike his brethren, made a clear connection between vegetarianism and the first precept; finally, the monk who ran the cow protection society was very much invested in the politics concerning animal welfarism, an activity otherwise shunned by most monks as excessively worldly.

These case studies can, therefore, be considered outlier cases. But, in many ways, these monks are also closer in character to the concerns of the laity for whom the treatment of animals is genuinely a pressing matter of moral concern. These outliers defy the standard view I first consider in terms of Gānanda Thera text, *The Question of Vegetarianism*. Thus, they occupy an unusual position in respect to their co-brethren. For the most part, however, a split appears between the general attitudes displayed by the laity and the general attitudes displayed by the monastics. In the remaining sections, I consider some of the socio-cultural reasons for why this split may have occurred.

V – Explanations for Differences in Monastic / Lay Opinion

It is apparent from the previous discussion that, for the most part, monks are not inclined to favour ethical vegetarianism or animal welfarism as they are more widely understood. On the other hand, a sizeable number of laypeople do look upon ethical vegetarianism in a positive light, and this stems mostly from their religious convictions. It remains to be seen, however, why and how this split between the laity and clergy has occurred.

I suggest at least two plausible explanations for this split, though I expect that these are only two factors of many likely factors. The first point is that animal welfarism is seen to have a political dimension, and many monks are probably wary of participating in political affairs, because politics are seen as a worldly activity. Laypeople, on the other hand, have no trouble in engaging in political activism, and often do so with much aplomb. Second, I argue that the difference in opinion might be attributable to the differing lay and monastic educational backgrounds and the textual sources that are focused on in each of these different domains. These two factors, and other factors besides, likely work together to produce the differences I observe here and in Chapter 5.

(a) Political Motivations in Animal Welfarism

I make a case in Chapter 4 that, historically, a political dimension to animal welfarism exists both in India and in Sri Lanka. This historical precedent has some bearing on how we interpret matters here. In summary, I observe that cow protectionism in India is heavily concerned with identity politics. In particular, I suggest that cow protectionism is a late invention in India, and that it was (and no doubt still is) connected intimately with the new and burgeoning idea of the Hindu identity. This identity was required as a way to challenge foreign — especially British — imperialism.

In connection to Sri Lanka, I observe a historical basis for anti-meat, pro-vegetarian discourses, and that these discourses were often motivated in part by political interests. As with India, this had a lot to do with colonisation: white imperialists were routinely characterised negatively as meat eaters while, in contrast, Sinhala Buddhists were cast as non-violent shunners of flesh foods. It is, therefore, important to observe here that racial politics are an important motivating factor in determining the animal welfare movement. Thus, Sinhala Buddhist animal welfarism can be understood as a movement that has arisen in part as a response to rival political, religious and ethnic factions.

Consider, for example, the monk from the cow protection society. When asked whether he thought Sinhala Buddhists care about animals over and above other groups, he said: “Yes. Because Sinhala Buddhists, more than other religions, [feel that] Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country. This is our country.” (Int — 6.1, 5d) It should be noted that the monk made the same statement spontaneously at the outset of the interview (Int — 6.1, 1a).

He then went on to add:

In Buddhism the primary thing is the view of non-violence towards all beings [or animals], that's the protection of the first precept (*pitturakinnava*), because of that this country is entirely [absorbed in these ideas], it's in our bodies. We have in our bodies the protection of the first precept against the slaying of animals. (Int — 6.1, 15d)

This sets Sinhala Buddhists apart from other non-Buddhists:

So other religions — Christians, Muslims, Hindus... [although there are] very devoted Hindus (*bhakthi Hindu*)... within Muslims [though], they don't really think about animals, they don't think about compassion or pity (*dayāva*), they don't think about people... (Int — 6.1, 20d)

This represents a damning assessment of Muslims, which appears to confirm a point made by Jha (c.f. Chapter 4) that the reason for cow protectionism being so popular in Sri Lanka is partly because of anti-Muslim sentiment.

Another example of this anti-Muslim sentiment in connection with animal protectionism can be found in the case of the Kandy *nāyaka* at Temple D. It may be recalled that he spoke favourably about vegetarianism (see p. 250), and spoke of how he and Nilamai averted a snake attack due to their good deeds towards animals. Another positive aspect of vegetarianism, he claimed, is that it prevents unattractive smells from occurring:

One experience I have had is that even when you raise a dog without meat or fish, even after a week of not bathing it doesn't smell. [A dog] who does eat meat and fish, if is not bathed for a couple of days [it will smell]. (Int — 4.4, 10d)

The example quickly turned from animals to humans: "Among people, those who eat meat... Muslims..." (ibid) He was interrupted at this point by a young layperson close at hand. Laughing, he stated: "Muslims smell." In saying this, the layperson saved the *nāyaka* from finishing his sentence — and it is likely that the Kandy *nāyaka* thought better of it, too. However, the general implication is clear: Muslims smell because they eat flesh.^{ccv}

It is important to consider these observations in the context of a background of anti-Muslim activities within Sri Lanka. For example, international news agencies have recently reported the expulsion of Islamic missionaries from Sri Lanka. The ostensive reason for the deportation was the brute fact that they were spreading Islamic doctrine.^{ccvi} Another report contains further examples of anti-Muslim activities: a group of two thousand Buddhists (monks included) marched on a mosque in Dambulla demanding that it be closed (along with a nearby Hindu temple).^{ccvii} These cases highlight how Sinhala Buddhists construct their religious identities as being divided against rival “foreign” religions.

Considering that cow protectionism in India was the product of precisely these sorts of ethnic-cum-religious differences, and considering that meat eating in medieval and early-modern Sri Lanka was considered a special characteristic of non-Sinhala people, it now appears that these sentiments remain in modern Sri Lanka, too. In Chapter 4, I argue the possible existence of an emerging notion of a Sinhala national identity comprised of two opposite forces: a Buddhist side that is invested in non-violence and harmlessness, and a violent, martial side that can be expressed when the need arises. It seems to me, in the comments made by the monk of the cow and animal protection organisation, that this side of Sinhala identity is being expressed.

Animal protectionism, and perhaps the diet that follows from it, therefore expresses a political angle in modern Sri Lanka. This fact might partly explain the monks’ reluctance to adopt such a position. It is clear from previous discussions that some monks view animal protectionism as an exclusively lay affair, which only people caught up in worldly affairs can pursue. Because politics is a worldly activity, it stands to reason that many monks might shun animal protectionism on this basis alone; this would be the case even if they secretly harboured sympathies for the animal welfare cause.

This is not to say that monks never participate in politics. As Tambiah (1992) makes very clear, Buddhist monks are quite often involved in national politics. There is an entire political party that represents, and is composed of, clergy. Furthermore, we see from this study that a minority of monks are involved in the animal protest movement. However, many monks are not interested in politics. In light of this, we begin to see why so many monks are also uninvested in animal welfare. Ñāṇanda Thera is, indeed, concerned that affairs involving animal protectionism can become “hot blood.” Hot-blooded conflict is not supposed to be the domain of the monastic renunciant. This, however, could be construed as an excusable (or at least understandable) activity for the laity insofar that the laity are viewed as being more prone to moral error.

This situation also connects back to the issue of Protestant Buddhism versus more traditional monastic forms of Buddhism. As I mention, Protestant Buddhists such as Dhammapala and Olcott provide innovative readings of Buddhism that often highlight discrepancies between Buddhism and rival religious organisations. They did this as a way to

revitalise Buddhism in the face of these rival religious groups, but simultaneously acted as a way to challenge the *saṅgha*, which was often viewed as decadent or ineffective. As Gombrich & Obeyesekere argue (1988), this Protestant Buddhist movement has made significant inroads in modern Sri Lanka; it seems to me that the division between the laity and the clergy in the previous analysis can also be understood in these terms: laypeople, inspired as they often are by Protestant forms of Buddhism, have been encouraged to be more active in how they act out Buddhist virtues. Gombrich & Obeyesekere cite the Sarvodaya movement as an example of Buddhist Protestantism in contemporary Sri Lanka (1988, p. 243). The Sarvodaya movement is a complicated movement that centres in rural areas of Sri Lanka. It is based around the idea of communal independence, and the goal of the group is to improve the welfare and connectedness of rural communities. Gombrich & Obeyesekere provide a much more satisfactory description of the movement in their own study (ibid). It seems to me, however, that the animal welfare movement is another example of a similar Protestant Buddhist movement, rooted as it is in the idea of an active form of Buddhism that is more creative in how Buddhist principles are applied. In this way, it can be construed as non-traditional, and, therefore, somewhat antagonistic to conventional monasticism.

In summary: the split between the laity and the monks on the question of vegetarianism can be understood, in part, by considering the role that politics play in animal welfarism. Monks tend to shun politics, while laypeople are more able to be involved in them. Hence, monks tend not to look upon animal welfarism favourably. This dovetails with Buddhist Protestantism in modern Sri Lanka: the laity is more attracted to the active, non-traditional, form of Buddhism offered by luminaries such as Olcott and Dhammapala.

Monks tend to avoid these non-traditional routes (though, not always, as my data indicate, and other examples, such as the Ramañña *nikāya*). It is interesting to observe what this implies for the *saṅgha*: even though members of the *saṅgha* are supposed to represent the moral ideal of what counts as a good Buddhist, there is, at the same time, a strong sense of Buddhist monks not being supposed to participate in moral activities. At least, they are not supposed to participate in moral activities that involve them engaging in worldly affairs. In this regard, monastic moral activities become severely limited.

(b) Textual Influences on Monks and Laity

Gombrich suggests that a great deal of the laities' knowledge of Buddhism comes from *Jātaka* tales and other para-canonical sacred texts (1991, Chapter 3, esp. pp. 115-121). This apparently, more or less, holds true today as well. Most Sinhala Buddhists are largely unfamiliar with Buddhism outside of the school textbooks that are based upon these para-canonical entries. They also receive an education about Buddhism from monks in the form of *baṇa*. Talented students might receive a more detailed education concerning Buddhism if they attend special Sunday schools or advanced classes at school, but, for the most part, the

cultural consciousness is concerned with *Jātaka* tales and other similarly lively stories from the canonical *suttas*.

The monks, on the other hand, are very much engaged with the *Vinaya*, the monastic discipline code that guides their behaviour. That monks hold the *Vinaya* in high regard was evident from the research I outline: monks repeatedly referred to the permissibility clause outlined in the *Vinaya*, but rarely considered the philosophical implications that might be entailed by the spirit of Buddhism outlined in the *sutta* materials. The *Vinaya* was a sacrosanct and inviolable document with which every monk was intimately familiar.

However, it is clear in Chapter 1 that a significant difference appears between the character of the *Vinaya* and the character of the *suttas* and *Jātaka* tales in terms of their respective treatment of animals. Recall that the *Jātaka* tales are replete with numerous stories extolling the evils of hunting and eating animals. The *suttas* furthermore state that killing an animal is just as evil as killing a human being. The *Vinaya*, on the other hand, maintains that killing animals is wrong, but much less wrong than killing a human being. A monk would be evicted from the order immediately if he committed murder, but killing an animal only requires a confession.

The fact that the laity and the monastic order depend in different ways on different source materials might help explain the aforementioned split. If the laity is more exposed to discourses found in the *Jātaka* and *sutta* literature, then it would stand to reason, in light of the discussion in Chapter 1, that they would have a more positive attitude towards animal welfarism. Monastic ambivalence to animal welfarism and vegetarianism, however, can be understood better when one considers the similarly ambivalent disposition the *Vinaya* holds towards animal affairs and animal slaughter more generally.

This situation is further compounded by a lack of access to the original texts. The laity principally engage the *Jātaka* and *sutta* literature, and then only in the form of brief summaries. But if a learned Buddhist were interested in engaging the original texts, they would be hard pressed to find a way to do so, because there is only one edition of the Pāli canon in Sinhala and it is intended only for monks. The translation itself is also highly obtuse, such that it can be read easily only by those with the highest command of the Sinhala language (Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988, p. 446). However, this is as much a problem for the laity as it is for the clergy, because there is no guarantee that a given monk will know Pāli. In many ways, the laity has more opportunity to interpret the texts, since its role within the religious structure is to listen to *dhamma*, while it is the role of monks to recite it. In this way, the laity is the premier interpreter of the *dhamma*, while monks merely know what the teachings say.

This reality was born out in my study: the clergy often gave very similar answers to similar questions and those answers often referred very closely to the textual tradition. The

lay answers differed wildly, however, and it was not easy to predict what a layperson would necessarily say to a given question. The laity has the luxury of free interpretation, while the monastics are, to some extent, more constrained by their tradition and, in particular, the prevailing interpretation of their monastic lineage. It seems to me that, in such a space of free interpretation, the laity is more likely to produce more creative answers and less likely to follow the traditional Buddhist conventions.

Given this situation, it stands to reason that a split would exist between the lay and monastic attitudes. This issue also connects back to the importance of Protestant Buddhism. Protestantism is, as I mention, connected with certain non-traditional “modern” Buddhist attitudes. This also allows for more creative flexibility in interpreting texts and ideas. Monastic orthodoxy, however, maintains the option of only a single interpretation — the interpretation sanctioned by the ruling *sangha*. This inflexibility is reflected in the conservative attitude that many monks took towards the issue, and their general reliance upon the *Vinaya*. Hence, we find the standard view about vegetarianism dominating the discussion and that this view was less present in the case of the laity.

VI – Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have considered in some detail the attitudes and positions that the clergy take in regards to vegetarianism. For the most part, the clergy are seemingly ambivalent about ethical vegetarianism, and, I noted, this contrasts with the case of the laity. I have attempted to offer some explanations of how this difference may have occurred in light of certain political and sociological facts about Sinhala animal welfarism. We can see in this chapter that the laity and the clergy address the problem of vegetarianism in different ways. This difference points to a way in which Buddhist ethical theory is not always entirely consistent in the type of advice it supplies and this point will be reinforced in the conclusion.

clxxiii I do not mean to suggest that all monks are opposed to vegetarianism from a moral perspective in the same way that Gānanda Thera is. Another book, for example, by Ācārya Buddhagayāve Sisilavandha Mēthriya Hivipāṇo, where the author argues in favour of vegetarianism, but, due to space constraints, I do not consider his book, also called *The Question of Vegetarianism* (2011). Furthermore, it is evident in the following that a minority of monks actively encourage vegetarianism from a moral point of view.

clxxiv *eya sathyayaki. ekala mā nirmāṅgshīva shudṭ a garvayakin yuthuva puna punā varṇanā ka! a kenekmi. emen ma an ayavada nirmāṅgsha āhāra bhakṣaṇaya piṇisa porondu karavā gath kenekmi. [...] enisā ma mama nirmāṅgshī āhāra anubhavaya kirīma pi! ibandava mahath se updam anamin sitiyeṃ.* (p. 13, para. 2)

clxxv *budurajāṇan vahanse mehilā, 'sthriyak vevā, puruṣ ayek vevā mas māngsha anubhavayen yuktha vūye veyi,' kiyā prāṇ aghāthaya no thorana seka.* (p. 15, para. 4)

clxxvi We also see how rhetoric was employed by pro-vegetarian agents in Chapter 3, where I consider the Jain polemics deployed to attack the supposedly lax Buddhist diet.

clxxvii *pinvatha, budurajāṇan vahanse mas varga kihipayak nam no vā! andiya yuthu yāyi thahanam kota vadā! a avast ā vinaya piṭ akayehi sandahan venavā.* (p. 17, para. 3)

clxxviii *singha mas vā! andū bhikṣ ūn vahanselā vanānthrayehi vāsaya karahi. evita mas gandhata ivaka! a singhayo pāmiṇa ema bhikṣ ūn marā dāmūha.* (p. 21, para. 2)

clxxix *ikbithi o thomo mas kapana pihya gena thamā ge kalava kapā dāsiyata dunnā ya.* (p. 25, para. 2)

clxxx As a sort of tangent, this can be compared with *The Lotus Sutra* (admittedly a Mahāyāna text), which calls for Buddhist devotees to sacrifice their limbs and flesh as an offering to the Buddha. In this way, they will attract a large amount of merit (Watson 1993, p. 9). It is plain that this is not acceptable in the *Vinaya*, nor in Theravāda Buddhism more generally. Certainly, Gñānanda Thera rejects the idea.

clxxxi Several of the laypeople were aware of this too. Yasitha, for example, stated: “But from another perspective one side says it’s about (*trikoṭ imatakmanshayak*) — that is to say, it wasn’t killed on your behalf.” (Int A — 7.1, 15b)

clxxxii *nāthaputhra nigaṇṭ a theme parama nirmāngshī keneki. he mubaye jīvath vana sathun hata hingsāvak vethi yi kiyā dath no mādde ya. [...]. ada pavā nigaṇṭ a sāvākayan ge niruvath sharīraya pirimi bāthimathun visin thetha mātththu karana lada yedi kābali valin pirisidu karana ayuru mavisin dāka thibe.* (p. 31, para. 3)

clxxxiii I should note that I consider these several objections in Chapter 3, and direct the reader there for further details.

clxxxiv *e heth me sā sarama avihingsāvādī yāyi kiyā gannā nāthaputhra nigaṇṭ a theme bhāgayathunvahanseta āthi padamata irṣayā ka! e ya. bhāgayathun vahanseta nindā apahāsa kirīme abhilāṣ ayen thama shrāvākayan vāda vivāda piṇisa usi gānvī ya.* (p. 32, para. 1)

clxxxv *ohu ge hondha ma gihi shrāvākayā vashayen siti upāli nam grohapatthiyā boudṭ a shrāvākayaku bavata path vū bava asā thama katin uṇ u le pita vuṇ e ya.* (p. 32, para. 1)

clxxxvi The temple was also very politically active, and it is plausible that the *nāyaka* may not have wished to participate in research that could have potentially cast the temple in a bad light by suggesting that the temple was doctrinally deviant, for example.

clxxxvii Consequently, the following is recounted from notes that were taken at the time. I have attempted to make them as accurate as possible, but I may have missed a number of points.

clxxxviii This same argument is also made in Western animal ethics literature by Joseph Bernstein (1996). Bernstein argues that opposition to medical research on animal welfare grounds is problematic in light of the fact that no sane person would want to go without medicine; it is impossible to produce medicine without some animals being harmed.

clxxxix It is important to distinguish between monastic *nikāya* and the *Nikāyas*, the latter of which are a body of Pāli canonical texts. The matter is confusing, because both terms are spelt and pronounced the same even though they relate to different things. I have followed convention, which is to capitalise *Nikāya* in the case of the textual sources, but not for the term *nikāya*, which relates to monastic affiliation.

cxc See, for example, Jeffrey Samuels: “[...] It is important to note that the Siyam fraternity, though open to many Sri Lankan castes when it was first introduced from Siam or Thailand to Sri Lanka in 1753, quickly became restricted to those hailing from the highest caste, the *govikula* or *goyigama*.” (2007, p. 776)

cxcī A much more detailed discussion of the role that caste plays in monastic affairs is given by Gombrich (1991, pp. 343-371). I direct the reader to his excellent study.

cxcīī A note: it would be highly improper to ask a monk or layperson directly about their caste. This is almost always inferred either through their forename, or perhaps by their occupation. In the case of monks, it is reasonably easy to infer by their caste affiliation.

cxcīīī As we find from Carrithers’s study, the Ramañña *nikāya* are often associated with the forest renunciate movement. In some respects, this can, in Gombrich’s classification, be classified as an unorthodox pseudo-Protestant movement insofar as its members believe that the *saṅgha* as traditionally understood become lax and requires a greater focus on meditative recluseship. Complicatedly, although many laity support monastic reform movements, there is also, in my experience, an attraction towards the more privileged and wealthy *nikāya*, especially Siyam, even though these *nikāya* are much more traditional and, therefore, contrary to the spirit of the aforementioned reformist movements. For more details about the forest renunciate movement, see Carrithers’s study (1983).

^{cxciv} Temple A was affiliated with the Siyam *nikāya*, Temple B and C with the Amarapura *nikāya*, and Temple D was of unknown designation. Temple E was, again, Siyam *nikāya*. Temple F was unknown.

^{cxcv} A side note: the name “Kandy” is a colonial invention. The city is traditionally known as “Nuwara”, which is a Sinhala word for “city”. Sinhala uses the name “Kandy” and ‘Nuwara’ in an interchangeable way, but Nuwara is considered more respectful.

^{cxcvi} This is a dialectical difference between the up country and lower country. In the up country, people might use the word “ong”, which is an idiomatic way of saying, “Hey! Look at this!” It is not used the low country (i.e., in supposedly sophisticated urban centres like Colombo and Galle). The fact that a monk would speak in this way is noteworthy.

^{cxcvii} See Tambiah’s study for counter examples (1992).

^{cxcviii} *mema buddha pūjā mandiraya thu! a thānpath karaṇa siya! u pūjā duvayyan nirmānsha (mas mā! u karavala bitthara umbalakaḍa valin thora) viya yuthu bava karuṇāven salakanna meyata vihārāḍipathi*. Note: *mandiraya* is a Pāli word and is in no way Sinhala.

^{cxcix} Because no audio recording equipment was on hand at the time, written notes were taken instead. Consequently, there is no interview script to which the discussion refers.

^{cc} *epā epā mas kannata kiri ammāge...2600 srī sambuddhathva jayanthiya samaru. gavamas kāmēn valakimu. sangviḍānaye panivuḍayaki* [address] [telephone number]. [picture inset]: *gava sampatha rakimu ape mava vage*. Note: The last sentence was also in Tamil.

^{cci} Gandhi, for example, uses this argument in his own writings on cow protectionism, except for Gandhi, mother cow is “in many ways better” than one’s own mother: “Our mother gives us milk for a couple of years and then expects us to serve her when we grow up. Mother cow expects from us nothing but grass and grain. Our mother often falls ill and expects service from us. Mother cow rarely falls ill. Our mother when she dies means expenses of burial or cremation. Mother cow is as useful dead as when alive” (in Jha, 2002, p. 17).

^{ccii} *sobā dahama obata dunnu. me surathal duhuṇa balala. menisun vana api kohomada. me osvāla rasa balanne. gava mas kāmēn valakimu*. [address and number supplied as above].

^{cciii} The monk who ran the Organisation for the Accumulation of Life helped shed some light on the roots of the cow protection movement to which Nawanga referred: “There was [...] from time to time, some monk leaders, some people [who] did an excessive amount of organisation [on behalf of] a number of cows, a number of animals [pertaining] to the view of non-violence. But those monks that did the work, the people who did the work, when they are gone the work ceases (*nātti ennava*). The government policies (*desa pālana darśana*) of Mr Premadasa [a Prime Minister in the 1980s] are different to the government policies of Mr

Mahinda [the present Prime Minister] and from time to time the monks that were around during the time, the leaders that were around during that time, the occupation of harming animals [and] cows was still there. It wasn't just around back then, it's around now. It might have slowed but it didn't stop." (Int — 6.1, 15c)

^{cciv} Another example of this activism occurred when the case of Buddhaghosa was cited. As I mention in Chapter 1, Buddhaghosa speaks favourably about destroying fish traps (thus implying that Buddhism accepts political activism in some way). The monk agreed with Buddhaghosa, saying: "If there is a place to catch fish, then fish will be caught whether it be a fishing net, [...], [or] whether it be thorns — you have to use it to catch fish. So if we destroy it then that's good. The catching of fish will stop." (c.f. Int — 6.1, 15c)

^{ccv} As a side note, the same argument is made in the *Lañkāvatāra Sūtra*. For example: "Recognising that his mouth smells most obnoxiously, even while living this life, let the Bodhisattva whose nature is pity, wholly refrain from eating meat." (Suzuki 1999, p. 214)

^{ccvi} 'Sri Lanka to deport 161 Islamic missionaries,' in *The Australian*, January 23, 2012, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/breaking-news/sri-lanka-to-deport-161-islamic-missionaries/story-fn3dxity-1226251639178>; accessed August 2012.

^{ccvii} 'Sri Lanka Buddhists disrupt mosque's prayers,' in *Aljazeera*, April 20, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2012/04/2012420105329861814.html>, accessed August 2012.

CONCLUSION | TENSIONS IN ANIMAL NON-VIOLENCE AND VEGETARIANISM IN THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM

In this thesis I have argued that there are a number of inconsistencies within Theravāda Buddhism in relation to non-violence towards animals and the practice of vegetarianism.

1. In the Vinaya killing animals is wrong, but only trivially wrong. In the sutta literature and Jātaka it is very wrong indeed. So there is an inconsistency in the Theravāda literature.
2. Eating plants is allowed, but killing plants is considered wrong. Plants are considered marginally sentient beings and it is perhaps only because plants are marginally sentient that their consumption is tolerated.
3. As per (1) killing animals is wrong (either trivially wrong or very wrong) but meat eating is nonetheless allowed. As argued in Chapter 3, an argument can be made that vegetarianism is implicitly endorsed by the canon insofar that a good Buddhist is to encourage others not to kill and not to support animal butcheries. Yet this is not consistent with the fact that meat eating is allowed.
4. In the ethnographic study it has been observed that lay people tended to encourage vegetarianism (as per the argument in Chapter 3) while monks tended to downplay the significance of vegetarianism. So there is an inconsistency between the lay view and the monastic view.

Why are there such inconsistencies about non-violence towards animals in Theravāda Buddhism? I will explore a few explanations here that look to more fundamental underlying issues within Theravāda Buddhist ethics more generally. One is a more permissive explanation: this is an explanation that uses the skilful means doctrine. The other is a more critical explanation. This explanation simply accepts that Buddhist ethical theory is inconsistent and provides inconsistent advice. I tend to favour the latter explanation.

The first explanation is that the inconsistency can be accounted for through the idea of skilful means (*upāya kusala*).^{ccviii} The skilful means doctrine – and other similar pedagogical explanations – is often raised as a way to explain inconsistencies within Buddhist theory. It is applied not only to the case of ethics, but also metaphysics. For example: why is it that the Buddha talks about selves in his discourses yet argues that there are no such things as selves? One answer is that this is a pedagogical technique: to talk about non-selves you have to come from the perspective of selfhood first, otherwise the former discussion will not make sense. The skilful means discourse operates under the idea of a developmental model of the mind: some ideas are required only temporarily so that more fundamental, better, ideas are understood. Once the superior view is adopted (e.g. non-self) the former erroneous view (e.g. personalism) can be abandoned.

One might therefore argue that the inconsistencies surrounding non-violence to animals and vegetarianism can be explained through reference the skilful means doctrine. So the reason why there is an inconsistency in the Vinaya and the suttas about animal non-violence is simply because one view is erroneous and the other is superior, and one is the vehicle to the other. Likewise, the inconsistency around meat eating and vegetarianism can be addressed in a similar way. The fact that meat eating is permitted but vegetarianism is not is because one is a lesser view that leads to the superior view.

However, this explanation is deeply problematic. What, after all, constitutes the lesser view in these cases and what constitutes the superior view? The superior view cannot be that animal non-violence is acceptable, as this goes against fundamental Buddhist doctrine as outlined in Chapter 1. Similarly, it can't be that meat eating is the ultimate Buddhist diet for reasons discussed in detail in Chapter 3. But it absurdly seems like this would have to be the direction things would go in if we adopted the skilful means explanation. Meat eating was explicitly permitted in the case of the clergy (as per the Vinaya) and likewise animal non-violence was less serious in the case of the Vinaya too – but the monastic way is meant to be superior to the lay life. So one would assume that, whatever the superior vehicle is, it is more closely affiliated with clerical activities than lay activities. If that were the case then things are very much around the wrong way (unless we adopt a set of practices that seem counter to Buddhist doctrine as argued).

The other explanation for this inconsistency is just that Buddhist ethics itself is inconsistent. There is a tendency within some literature to try and paper over inconsistencies by applying the skilful means doctrine to any case where Buddhist metaphysics or ethics turns out to be potentially contradictory. This urge should be resisted. It should be resisted for at least two reasons. The first reason is that it should not be assumed that any contradictory position in the Buddhist canon is an example of skilful means. This is a bad inference – it is at least as plausible that the position is simply inconsistent on an issue rather than it being a subtle example of skilfulness. This is particularly likely in light of the number of redactions the Pāli texts have undergone in the last few thousand years. During that time it is entirely plausible that contradictory positions have slipped into the texts and that we now have a document that is very much at odds with itself. The second reason is that overusing the skilful means doctrine undermines our capacity to be able to question and be critical of the various positions described in the canon. Applying the skilful means doctrine too liberally effectively means that there are never any contradictions or errors in the canon whatsoever since any error therein is simply a mechanism by which the correct view can be realised. In short, the positions described in the canon are not falsifiable. For example - why did the Buddha, if he was omniscient, maintain an atomic theory that has, according to our best physics, turned out to be false? The answer, according to a skilful means perspective, is that the Buddhist knew but because X he could not say it. Instead he used the (false) atomic theory. This is unbelievable. Note that it is not unbelievable in all cases: for example, I have argued in

Chapter 3 that the Buddha resisted adopting vegetarianism for political reasons. This might be considered a “skilful” decision, but if it is an example of skilful means we have independent reasons for thinking it was a skilful political decision. So in this case there is no danger that this explanation is purely ad hoc – unlike with the case of the atomic theory.

My favoured explanation for why the canon is inconsistent is not because it is some subtle mechanism by which people can come to the ‘superior view’. Rather, my explanation is just that the canon itself is simply inconsistent and the cause of this is probably because different people produced the canon and they had different ideas about what should be said in it. It is also likely that, when comparing the Vinaya with the sutta literature, that opportunism played a large role. The Vinaya was meant for monks and was probably composed in ad hoc manner to address ad hoc situations. The sutta literature is more sermon-like and intended for a more general audience. So the purpose of both documents is different and therefore inconsistencies between them will arise. This explanation is the more realistic account for why there are inconsistencies on these matters.

This accounts for the inconsistency over non-violence towards animals, but what about the inconsistency concerning vegetarianism? As I argue in Chapter 3, it would appear that the Buddha’s doctrine implicitly favoured vegetarianism as a moral necessity, but due to peculiar socio-cultural and political pressures was reluctant to make vegetarianism mandatory. These socio-cultural and political pressures were probably concerned with the fear that the Buddhist order would have split had vegetarianism been allowed since this would have given undue influence to his rival Devadatta. It is also highly likely that the Buddha wanted to ensure that Buddhism was not confused with the other heterodox school of Jainism. We can see then that the decision to allow meat eating was simply prudential and that from a purely moral perspective the doctrine endorses vegetarianism. This complicated relation between what is prudentially right and what is morally right continues to influence affairs today. The tension produced by this complication has meant that the advice the canon provides is quite opaque and is not ideal for a systematic applied moral theory.

It is unsurprising then that the monks and laity have wildly different ideas about what constitutes the correct behaviour in respect to diet. After all, the textual tradition upon which many of their doctrinal views are based is itself inconsistent. This has, to some extent, meant that monks may view themselves exempt from certain implicit moral requirements seemingly encouraged by the Buddha’s teaching.^{ccix} This was especially apparent in the case of some of the monks I interviewed who stated that the question of vegetarianism is an exclusive matter for the laity. I hasten to add, of course, that not all monks maintained this indifferent attitude and at least some of them took vegetarianism very seriously. In any case, these general differences between lay and monastic views have been considered more fully in Chapter 6. There I pointed out that there are other complicated socio-cultural reasons why lay people and monks might promote or avoid vegetarianism. I mentioned that monks are likely to want

to shun politicised activities. This, of course, further reinforces the point that monks tend to view themselves as standing apart from morality to some extent.

As argued, the laity tend to take morality much more seriously, though that might be partly because lay people have more at stake than the clergy (lay people see their afterlife as imperilled while monks are generally viewed as destined for a good rebirth). Nonetheless, lay people also sometimes occupy a position of moral indifference. This is especially evident in cases where social opportunism drives their moral decisions. Lay people, for example, might be inclined to give meat out of a sense of obligation rather than out of what they know in their hearts to be right. Given these contemporary social peculiarities, we should therefore avoid blaming the texts completely, but it is interesting to see how the inconsistencies within the canon lead to problems in an applied setting.

Theravāda Buddhism, as a doctrine described in the Pāli canon, strongly implies that vegetarianism is morally right, but it does not follow through with this promise. While some practicing Sinhala Buddhists see the former point and ignore the latter point, others approach the matter from the other way around. The guidance that Theravāda Buddhism supplies in terms of diet is therefore fickle and we should not be surprised that many people arrive at differing conclusions on this question.

^{ccviii} The skilful means doctrine is usually more associated with Mahāyāna Buddhism though people occasionally apply the skilful means doctrine to Theravāda Buddhism and the Pāli canon. For example, the use of the term “self” in the canon can be cited as a practical example of the skilful means doctrine, as can the use of Brahman in the canon (when in fact the Brahman in the conventional Brahmanical sense maintains a view that the Buddhist widely criticizes). For a more detailed discussion of the skilful means doctrine in early Buddhism see Gombrich (2009, p. 7-8).

^{ccix} I would like to thank my second anonymous examiner for influencing my thinking on the question what the results of the project might mean. Originally my interpretation was much less critical, but my examiner helpfully challenged this view and I now believe he is correct in suggesting that I take a more critical attitude towards the Buddhist view on these particular moral matters. So I acknowledge and thank him/her for influencing me in this important area.

Part Three: Appendices

Interview Transcripts, Notes on Egg Eating, Māligāva Letter

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APPENDIX 2 — TRANSLATION OF SRI DALADĀ MĀLIGĀVA LETTER

[Sri Daladā Māligāva Emblem]

Sri Daladā Māligāva

Sri Daladā Māligāva list of special foods (*multhāñ*) and other *pūjā* items for the *buddha pūjā*.

Uncooked rice	seru	5
Par-boiled rice (exclude red unscrubbed rice)	seru	32
Different vegetables	grams	500 each
Coconuts	#	15
Coconut oil	bottles	4
Treacle	bottles	3
Salt	seru	$\frac{1}{2}$
Yellow powder (turmeric)	grams	200
Chilli powder	grams	500
Shallots	grams	500
Garlic	grams	200
Coriander ground	grams	200
Cumin	grams	100
Fenugreek	grams	100
Mustard seeds	grams	50
Black pepper	grams	100
Sago	grams	250

Ripe 'ambul' bananas	#	10
Limes	#	10
Curry leaves	#	10
Cinnamon sticks	#	10
Pandanus leaf	#	10
Tamarind pods	#	10
Goraka pods (or similar)	#	10
Margarine	grams	500
Honey (bee)	bottles	$\frac{1}{4}$
Heated sugar cane extract	bottle	$\frac{1}{4}$
[Impure] coconut oil (for the <i>pūjā</i> lamp)	bottles	$\frac{1}{2}$
Processed white sugar	kilos	2
Unprocessed white sugar	grams	750
Raw ginger	grams	250
Raisins (raw or dried)	grams	300
Preserved ginger	grams	500
Jaggery	two $\frac{1}{2}$ shell	x1
Sweet oranges	#	6
Mango	#	6
Pineapple	#	1
Sugar	grams	250
Tea leaves	grams	100
Soap [for cleaning]	piece	1
'Vim' [dish washing liquid for cleaning]	small tin	1
Betel set in basket (no tobacco leaves)		

Jasmine flowers in basket

Incense powder	grams	200
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Undistilled alcohol [for cleaning]	bottle	1
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(See Appendix 5, Image 8, for facsimile of original)

APPENDIX 3 - IMAGES

Image 1: Seenigama Temple I



Seenigama temple attendees queueing to see the *kapurā!* a to ask for divine help or to bring a curse upon an enemy (taken by author, 2008).

Image 2: Seenigama Temple II



A statue that was washed up near Seenigama after the Boxing Day Tsunami in 2004. We were told that the Seenigama temple was miraculously spared from the devastation. The statue is thought of as both a divine gift, and a way to commemorate the power of the temple (photography by author, 2008).

Image 3: Sri Daladā Māligāva *dānē*



Example of *dānē* ceremony at the Sri Daladā Māligāva; lay people are collecting dishes to feed the monks. Note the four *aṭṭ apirikara* at the end of the table. (photograph by author, 2008).

Image 4: Kiri Vehera buddha ge sign



The sign attached to the buddha ge at the Katargama Kiri Vehera stūpa – note the modern architectural design (photography by author, 2012).

Image 5: Billboard in Dehiwala



Sign advertising the *Organisation for the Accumulation of Life* at Dehiwala junction, Colombo (photograph by author, 2012).

Image 6: Billboard in Wellawatta



A billboard that promotes the *Organisation for the Accumulation of Life*, in Wellawatta junction. Notice the prominent role that Buddhism plays in this image. (photograph by author, 2012).

Image 7:

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reasons.

The book cover of '*Give us space to live*', note the prevalence of dead cows on the cover
(image remains the property of Rathnakāra, 2009).

Image 8: Sri Daladā Māligāva Letter



ශ්‍රී දළදා මාළිගාව

ශ්‍රී දළදා මාළිගාවේ අමුතු මුද්‍රිතයක් බුද්ධිපුරව සඳහා අවශ්‍ය වූයේද ලැයිස්තුව

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✓ වළවළු වැනි ලුණු 500 බැගින්	වර්ග	32	✓ උක් පැණි	බෝතල්	1/4		
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✓ පොල්කෙල්	බෝතල්	4	✓ සීනි	කිලෝ	2		
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✓ ලුණු	සේරු	1/2	✓ අම්බු ඉඳුරු	ලුණු	250		
✓ කහ කුඩු	ලුණු	200	✓ මුද්දරුපලුම් (අම්බු හෝ වියළි)	ලුණු	300		
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✓ කොත්තමල්ලි කුඩු	ලුණු	200	✓ අඹ	ගෙඩි	6		
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සීනි, ගෝකොළ, සිරි පැ 1, බුලත්, පුවක්, හුණු, දම්කොළ සහිත දැනටත් වට්ටියක් අවශ්‍යයි.

ඉහත ලැයිස්තුවේ සඳහන් ද්‍රව්‍ය භාරදීමට නියමිත දින දහවල් 12 ත් 1 ත් අතර මුද්‍රිතයේ වෙත භාරදිය යුතුය.

Example of a Sri Daladā Māligāva Letter that is supplied to laity which instructs *dāyaka* on what materials to supply for the *muruthan pujāva* (all images and content remain the intellectual property of the Sri Daladā Māligāva).

APPENDIX 4 – VIEWS ON EGG CONSUMPTION

The issue of egg consumption came up several times in the study but the issue did not affect the substantive content of the thesis argument to a great extent. Therefore, I have included the results of this part of the study in this appendix. The topic of egg eating can be regarded as being connected to the general subject of vegetarianism and animal non-violence but nonetheless it does occupy a special position.

In the west, vegetarianism is generally of the ovo-lacto variety. That is, vegetarianism involves the eating of dairy products including eggs. In Sri Lanka, vegetarianism is typically regarded as encompassing the non-eating of eggs. The fact that vegetarianism is seen in this light deserves further investigation. Why is it that Sinhala Buddhist vegetarians regard non-egg eating as so important? It is this question I answer here.

As a point of departure, it is necessary to consider what other anthropologists have said on this niche topic. But because it is, in fact, a niche subject, there is only one ethnographer (as far as I am aware) that has really commented on it — Richard Gombrich:

A true vegetarian Buddhist eats no eggs; even educated people think that all eggs are fertilized, and when I tried to tell people that a hen could lay without prior assistance from a cockerel, I was never believed, but probably considered crazy. (1991, p.305)

As we will see, in this regard things have not changed much since Gombrich conducted his research in the late 70s. However, I could not confirm Gombrich's observation that middle-class Buddhists were able to buy "pre-cracked eggs" so as to not accrue any *pav*.

When the informants were asked about the idea of "pre-cracked" Buddhist eggs, they were universally puzzled by the idea. The *nāyaka* at Temple B claimed that some eggs are "Buddhist eggs" (in English) but it turns out that he meant that they are just unfertilised eggs. (Int – 2.1, 1b) I do not believe that this is what Gombrich means when he talks about "pre-cracked eggs". My explanation for this deviation from Gombrich's observation is as follows: either the practice of buying pre-cracked eggs has gone out of favour since the 1970s or it was a regional activity that did not penetrate into Colombo and other urban centres. I favour the former explanation. Furthermore, Gombrich suggests that the eating of eggs "seem to be [morally] worse than [eating] fish" (ibid), but I did not find this to be the case: people generally lumped meat consumption and egg consumption in together — both are bad activities. Nonetheless, as we shall see, many people had peculiar ideas about eating eggs and all regarded it as a morally hazardous activity.

Many of the views surrounding eggs were borderline incoherent or extremely confused. Chamika, for example, suggested that all eggs were fertilised:

Eggs mean there is a male or female chick [inside]. There is some life in it, no? [put rhetorically]. There was a lot of *pav* [bad karma; demerit] because it was in the stomach. That means that before they [the chick] [even] comes into the world we've already satisfied our stomachs and that is a big sin (*loku pavak*). (Int – 6.1, 10a)

Renuka echoed the idea that all eggs are fertilised: "I think there is a baby inside it [the egg]," (Int – 1.3, 5a) she said, referring to all eggs universally. Nonetheless, it appears that she was confused over whether all eggs contain chicks because she subsequently implied that more needs to happen for a chick to be present. In particular, she said: "The reason I think it is right [to eat eggs] is because with just an egg it doesn't come [the chick]. You need a current ["current", i.e. electricity, was said in English] as well or you need a female, and a hen needs to come there [and sit on the egg]." (ibid) It was clear that her overall understanding of chicken reproduction was relatively rudimentary. Another interviewee with unusual views about egg fertilisation came from one of the Kägalle informants, Priyanka. Priyanka said:

I eat eggs — the reason I eat eggs is [because] the chicken's meat is entirely in the egg, so the hen gives birth to life but only after she sits on it does it have life in it. If you remove the egg, or if you bought the egg to the market, that egg is never going to have life. If the egg is with the hen for 21 days then it has life. (Int – 8.2, 10a)

Priyanka maintained the view that the hen was responsible for producing life in the egg. She did not seem to be aware that a rooster was required: it was enough just that the hen sat on the egg. For this reason, Priyanka did not eat eggs that a hen had sat on for too long because it was "bad" [i.e., morally hazardous] (ibid). Again, within the Kägalle sample, Buddhika the carpenter expressed some unusual views concerning egg consumption. He didn't eat them because he believed that they have life. He agreed that without a rooster to complete fertilisation there cannot be life in the egg, but he nonetheless did not think it was okay to eat eggs because "without a rooster there would not even be a way for the chicken to lay the egg. Eventually, after a while, it becomes a chicken." (Int — 8.5, 15a) Buddhika was not aware that an egg is just menstrual discharge and casts some doubt on whether he really understood the hen's life cycle.

These several observations seem to confirm Gombrich's claim that many lay Sinhala Buddhists are unaware of the biological conditions that go into egg fertilisation. This is not to say that all people are totally unaware of the actual process, but a surprising number of informants clearly have, at best, a vague understanding. One informant who was familiar with the hen's life cycle was Kān̄thi Aunty from the Kēgalle sample. She said: "Sometimes there are eggs that don't have chicks in them. There's no problem if you eat those." (Int — 8.4, 5c) She was quite aware that hens inevitably lay eggs whether or not there is a rooster.

Nawanga had the most to say about egg eating. As usual, this was partly because he was one of the more erudite informants and also the most knowledgeable about Buddhism. In accordance with his vegetarian diet he said that he did not eat eggs: "I don't eat eggs because actually some people say that there is a life (*paṇa*) inside the egg; some people say there is no life." (Int — 1.1, 10a) In other words, it is not clear whether there is or is not a chick, and therefore life, in an egg. So to avoid any moral hazard he chose to avoid eating eggs altogether.

Aside from this epistemic problem, Nawanga also believed that the consumption of eggs inevitably causes an excess of egg eating. Nawanga took such excesses to be bad for undisclosed reasons, though it is plausible that this objection may stem from Buddhist presuppositions – as we learnt in Chapter 3 excess eating is considered sinful. He said:

Other people [non-vegetarians] assume that they [the vegetarians] don't get enough vitamins and therefore they are offered [or given, perhaps] more eggs. When that happens you get used to eating eggs. So I decided that I wasn't going to eat egg or egg-products. (Int – 1.1, 20a)

When it was asked what he would do if he knew for sure that there were no life in eggs, Nawanga replied:

Then you should reduce the amount of eggs [you eat]. That means you should eat enough to supplement your lack of eating flesh, but there is no need to eat a heap of it. (ibid)

It is clear, then, that Nawanga took a dim view of egg eating and at the very least he believed that it should be avoided wherever possible.

As for the other vegetarians, none of them ate eggs: Mrs Jayawardene notes that her vegetarian husband did not eat eggs (Int — 7.3, 10a), and Charuni said that she does not eat eggs though her reasoning why this is so is absent: “I just don’t think about it every much.” (Int — 2.1, 1b) When asked whether she eats eggs in other products she says: “No. I don’t eat eggs, boiled, or having anything done to it,” but then reconsiders this, saying “... despite that, if they’re in cakes, if I go to a party you can’t keep looking out for it. There have been situations where I’ve had to eat it in cakes.” (ibid) A few non-vegetarians also refuse to take eggs though their reasons were often arbitrary. In particular, a very poor cleaner named Niromi — who provides only short and rudimentary answers to all the questions — reports that although her son liked to eat eggs the rest of the family abstains completely. (Int — 5.1, 1a) When asked why, she simply said that this was the custom in her household. In general, most non-vegetarians ate eggs as a matter of course; for them the behaviour is uncontroversial.

I also made a point of asking the clergy about this issue too. Some of the monks were much more aware of the biological necessities surrounding eggs than the laity. The *nāyaka* at Temple B, for example, stated that unfertilised eggs are acceptable to eat because there is “no rooster involvement” — a rather charming euphemism — and that this meant that, “there was no life in it.” (Int — 2.1, 5b) This of course implies that it is safe to eat. His deputy maintained a similar view: “Society now has divided eggs with seeds and eggs without seeds.” (Int 2.2, 20b) In accordance with this view the small monk at the *perivena* states that eating eggs without a “seed” (*bīja*) in it are acceptable. (Int — 3.2, 5a) Talking of a “seed” in these cases relates to the question of fertilisation. Indeed, when pressed most monks provide biologically plausible explanations for the origins of eggs. This was not always the case with the laity.

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